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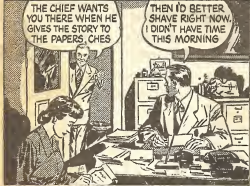
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VOL. 7 SEPTEMBER, 1950 NO. 2

THREE NOVELS OF FUTURE WORLDS

- THE STAR BEAST**.....*Poul Anderson* 10
The ancient enemy serving Harol was a fraud—the real destroyer came striding down from the stars—the forgotten beast in man, bred out of earth for a thousand years!
- THE MIND MASTERS**.....*Nell R. Jones* 70
The deathless metal men of Zer battle to a strange finish—a foe as in-destructible as themselves!
- BEYOND SPACE AND TIME**.....*Joel Townsley Rogers* 102
Beyond the galaxy itself lay Helver's course—one man alone against the stars!

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SHORT STORIES

- HALF-LIFE**.....*Alfred Coppel* 30
He was not quite human, the thing-in-a-bottle that guarded the planetoid—yet he knew he could die as well as any man!
- ULTIMATE QUEST**.....*John Holbrook* 40
They blasted off on a one-way journey that might make them a blazing star—or man's symbol of hope!
- THE FIRST**.....*Kris Neville* 53
The world gave Sam man's most priceless heritage—Eden . . . alone!
- THE UNDYING ONES**.....*Fredric Brown* 60
Donross stalked a mighty prey—the thing that men call death!
- THE WORD FROM THE VOID**.....*Mack Reynolds* 99
All roads were open to Camp—save man's immortal right to be—himself!
- FINAL ENEMY**.....*L. Ron Hubbard* 119
What was the terrible shadow man could not escape to the outermost universe!

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FANDOM'S CORNER

Conducted by James V. Taurasi

LOCAL club news, this month, is nonexistent, but there is plenty doing in the field of local and national conventions, conclaves and conferences.

The Norwescon Committee, which is putting on the biggest affair, the annual World Science-Fiction Convention, have just announced that Anthony Boucher will be their guest of honor. Anthony Boucher, whose real name is William Anthony Parker White, is well known as a writer of both fantasy and detective fiction under the name of H. H. Holmes as well as the Boucher byline. It was under the latter name that he wrote "Rocket to the Morgue", a detective novel about science-fiction fans and authors. The eighth World Science-Fiction Convention will be held in Portland, Oregon, September 1-4, 1950. For full information, write to Norwescon Committee, Box 8517, Portland 7, Oregon.

Now let's look at the local conferences which have been held over the early summer months:

The Disclave was held on April 30th

(Continued on page 8)

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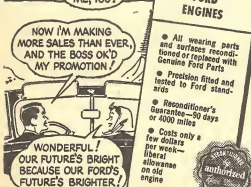
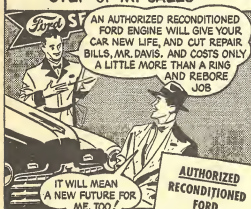
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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

(Continued from page 6)

in Washington, D. C. with many fans, authors, and editors present—was highlighted by an sf movie and the usual auction.

The Ohio Conference was held on May 21st in Bellfountain, Ohio, also well supplied with well-known sf authors and fans.

Nineteen fifty-one, if the trend continues, will probably see a get-together in every major city in the United States. Science-fiction fandom has grown quite a bit since the early days of 1937 when one get-together a year, usually only in the East, was all fandom could expect.

News has arrived that the second issue of the British edition of *Super Science Stories* has appeared in England. This issue, undated, reprints stories and features from the November 1949 U. S. edition. Priced in England at one shilling, it contains somewhat fewer pages than the U.S. edition.

Now for the fan press:

Science Fiction Weekly, published by Ronald Friedman, 1980 E. 8th St., Brooklyn 23, N. Y. 5¢. This new weekly, 4 to 8 mimeographed pages, contains mostly fan news, with a small amount of pro mag and book news. We have four issues on hand and a letter from Ron stating that his mimeo has broken down. We expect great doings by this weekly as soon as the mimeo is repaired. Ron has also started to publish a "daily" postal card news mag. Three issues of this are on file.

Futurist, No. 1, published quarterly for the NFFF and edited by Red Boggs, 2215 Benjamin St. N.E., Minneapolis 18, Minn. The mag is published by Ray C. Higgs, at 15¢ (10¢ to NFFF members). This is the NFFF general fan mag. 24 pages in excellent mimeographing, of very interesting articles and features. Very good cover by Grossman. We enjoyed all the articles,

(Continued on page 129)

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The tiger stopped. He knew that voice. He remembered—he remembered—

The STAR BEAST

CHAPTER ONE

Therapy for Paradise

THE REBIRTH technician thought he had heard everything in the course of some three centuries. But he was astonished now.

"My dear fellow—" he said. "Did you say a tiger—"

"That's right," said Harol. "You can do it, can't you?"

"Well—I suppose so. I'd have to study

The ancient enemy whose body served Harol's immortal brain in its ultimate flight was a fraud—a replica shaped by the miracle science of the last men. The real destroyer came striding terribly down from the stars—the forgotten beast-in-man, bred out of helpless Earth for a thousand years!



By POUL ANDERSON

the problem first, of course. Nobody has ever wanted a rebirth that far from human. But offhand I'd say it was possible." The technician's eyes lit with a gleam which had not been there for many decades. "It would at least be—interesting!"

"I think you already have a record of a tiger," said Harol.

"Oh, we must have. We have records of every animal still extant when the technique was invented, and I'm sure there must still have been a few tigers around then. But it's a problem of modification. A human mind just can't exist in a nervous system that different. We'd have to change the record enough — larger brain with more convolutions, of course, and so on. . . . Even then it'd be far from perfect, but your basic mentality should be stable for a year or two, barring accidents. That's all the time you'd want anyway, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," said Harol.

"Rebirth in animal forms is getting fashionable these days," admitted the technician. "But so far they've only wanted animals with easily modified systems. Anthropoid apes, now—you don't even have to change a chimpanzee's brain at all for it to hold a stable human mentality for years. Elephants are good too. But—a tiger—" He shook his head. "I suppose it can be done, after a fashion. But why not a gorilla?"

"I want a carnivore," said Harol.

"Your psychiatrist, I suppose—" hinted the technician.

Harol nodded curtly. The technician sighed and gave up the hope of juicy confessions. A worker at Rebirth Station heard a lot of strange stories, but this fellow wasn't giving. Oh, well, the mere fact of his demand would furnish gossip for days.

"When can it be ready?" asked Harol.

The technician scratched his head thoughtfully. "It'll take a while," he said.

"We have to get the record scanned, you know, and work out a basic neural pattern that'll hold the human mind. It's more than a simple memory-superimposition. The genes control an organism all through its lifespan, dictating, within the limits of environment, even the time and speed of aging. You can't have an animal with an ontogeny entirely opposed to its basic phylogeny—it wouldn't be viable. So we'll have to modify the very molecules of the cells, as well as the gross anatomy of the nervous system."

"In short," smiled Harol, "this intelligent tiger will breed true.

"If it found a similar tigress," answered the technician. "Not a real one—there aren't any left, and besides, the heredity would be too different. But maybe you want a female body for someone?"

"No, I only want a body for myself," Briefly, Harol thought of Avi and tried to imagine her incarnated in the supple, deadly grace of the huge cat. But no, she wasn't the type. And solitude was part of the therapy anyway.

"Once we have the modified record, of course, there's nothing to superimposing your memory patterns on it," said the technician. "That'll be just the usual process, like any human rebirth. But to make up that record—well, I can put the special scanning and computing units over at Research on the problem. Nobody's working there. Say a week. Will that do?"

"Fine," said Harol. "I'll be back in a week."

He turned with a brief good-by and went down the long slideway toward the nearest transmitter. It was almost deserted now save for the unhuman forms of mobile robots gliding on their errands. The faint, deep hum of activity which filled Rebirth Station was almost entirely that of machines, of electronic flows whispering through vacuum, the silent cerebration of artificial intellects so far surpass-

ing those of their human creators that men could no longer follow their thoughts. A human brain simply couldn't operate with that many simultaneous factors.

The machines were the latter-day oracles. And the life-giving gods. *We're parasites on our machines*, thought Harol. *We're little fleas hopping around on the giants we created, once. There are no real human scientists any more. How can there be, when the electronic brains and the great machines which are their bodies can do it all so much quicker and better—can do things we would never even have dreamed of, things of which man's highest geniuses have only the faintest glimmer of an understanding? That has paralyzed us, that and the rebirth immortality. Now there's nothing left but a life of idleness and a round of pleasure—and how much fun is anything after centuries?*

It was no wonder that animal rebirth was all the rage. It offered some prospect of novelty—for a while.

He passed a mirror and paused to look at himself. There was nothing unusual about him; he had the tall body and handsome features that were uniform today. There was a little gray at his temples and he was getting a bit bald on top, though this body was only thirty-five. But then it always had aged early. In the old days he'd hardly have reached a hundred.

I am—let me see—four hundred and sixty-three years old. At least, my memory is—and what am I, the essential I, but a memory track?

Unlike most of the people in the building, he wore clothes, a light tunic and cloak. He was a little sensitive about the flabbiness of his body. He really should keep himself in better shape. But what was the point of it, really, when his twenty-year-old record was so superb a specimen?

He reached the transmitter booth and hesitated a moment, wondering where to go. He could go home—have to get his

affairs in order before undertaking the tiger phase—or he could drop in on Avi or— His mind wandered away until he came to himself with an angry start. After four and a half centuries, it was getting hard to coöordinate all his memories; he was becoming increasingly absent-minded. Have to get the psychostaff at Rebirth to go over his record, one of these generations, and eliminate some of that useless clutter from his synapses.

He decided to visit Avi. As he spoke her name to the transmitter and waited for it to hunt through the electronic files at Central for her current residence, the thought came that in all his lifetime he had only twice seen Rebirth Station from the outside. The place was immense, a featureless pile rearing skyward above the almost empty European forests—as impressive a sight, in its way, as Tycho Crater or the rings of Saturn. But when the transmitter sent you directly from booth to booth, inside the buildings, you rarely had occasion to look at their exteriors.

For a moment he toyed with the thought of having himself transmitted to some nearby house just to see the Station. But—oh, well, any time in the next few millennia. The Station would last forever, and so would he.

The transmitter field was generated. At the speed of light, Harold flashed around the world to Avi's dwelling.

THE OCCASION was ceremonial enough for Ramacan to put on his best clothes, a red cloak over his tunic and the many jeweled ornaments prescribed for formal wear. Then he sat down by his transmitter and waited.

The booth stood just inside the colonnaded verandah. From his seat, Ramacan could look through the open doors to the great slopes and peaks of the Caucasus, green now with returning summer save where the everlasting snows flashed under

a bright sky. He had lived here for many centuries, contrary to the restlessness of most Earthlings. But he liked the place. It had a quiet immensity; it never changed. Most humans these days sought variety, a feverish quest for the new and untasted, old minds in young bodies trying to recapture a lost freshness. Ramacan was—they called him stodgy, probably. Stable or steady might be closer to the truth. Which made him ideal for his work. Most of what government remained on Earth was left to him.

Felgi was late. Ramacan didn't worry about it; he was never in a hurry himself. But when the Procyonite did arrive, the manner of it brought an amazed oath even from the Earthling.

He didn't come through the transmitter. He came in a boat from his ship, a lean metal shark drifting out of the sky and sighing to the lawn. Ramacan noticed the flat turrets and the ominous muzzles of guns projecting from them. Anachronism—Sol hadn't seen a warship for more centuries than he could remember. But—

Felgi came out of the airlock. He was followed by a squad of armed guards, who ground their blasters and stood to stiff attention. The Procyonite captain walked alone up to the house.

Ramacan had met him before, but he studied the man with a new attention. Like most in his fleet, Felgi was a little undersized by Earthly standards, and the rigidity of his face and posture were almost shocking. His severe, form-fitting black uniform differed little from those of his subordinates except for insignia of rank. His features were gaunt, dark with the protective pigmentation necessary under the terrible blaze of Procyon, and there was something in his eyes which Ramacan had never seen before.

The Procyonites looked human enough. But Ramacan wondered if there was any truth to those rumors which had been flying about Earth since their arrival, that

mutation and selection during their long and cruel stay had changed the colonists into something that could never have been at home.

Certainly their social setup and their basic psychology seemed to be—foreign.

Felgi came up the short escalator to the verandah and bowed stiffly. The psychographs had taught him modern Terrestrial, but his voice still held an echo of the harsh colonial tongue and his phrasing was strange: "Greeting to you, Commander."

Ramacan returned the bow, but his was the elaborate sweeping gesture of Earth. "Be welcome, Gen—ah—General Felgi." Then, informally: "Please come in."

"Thank you." The other man walked into the house.

"Your companions—?"

"My *men* will remain outside." Felgi sat down without being invited, a serious breach of etiquette—but after all, the mores of his home were different.

"As you wish." Ramacan dialed for drinks on the room creator.

"No," said Felgi.

Pardon me?"

"We don't drink at Procyon. I thought you knew that."

"Pardon me. I had forgotten." Regretfully, Ramacan let the wine and glasses return to the matter bank and sat down.

Felgi sat with steely erectness, making the efforts of the seat to mold itself to his contours futile. Slowly, Ramacan recognized the emotion that crackled and smoldered behind the dark lean visage.

Anger.

"I trust you are finding your stay on Earth pleasant," he said into the silence.

"Let us not make meaningless words," snapped Felgi. "I am here on business."

"As you wish." Ramacan tried to relax, but he couldn't; his nerves and muscles were suddenly tight.

"As far as I can gather," said Felgi, "you head the government of Sol."

"I suppose you could say that. I have the title of Coördinator. But there isn't much to coördinate these days. Our social system practically runs itself."

"Insofar as you have one. But actually you are completely disorganized. Every individual seems to be sufficient to himself."

"Naturally. When everyone owns a matter creator which can supply all his ordinary needs, there is bound to be economic and thus a large degree of social independence. We have public services, of course—Rebirth Station, Power Station, Transmitter Central, and a few others. But there aren't many."

"I cannot see why you aren't overwhelmed by crime." The last word was necessarily Procyonian, and Ramacan raised his eyebrows puzzledly. "Anti-social behavior," explained Felgi irritably. "Theft, murder, destruction."

"What possible need has anyone to steal?" asked Ramacan, surprised. "And the present degree of independence virtually eliminates social friction. Actual psychoses have been removed from the neural components of the rebirth records long ago."

"At any rate, I assume you speak for Sol."

"How can I speak for almost a billion different people? I have little authority, you know. So little is needed. However, I'll do all I can if you'll only tell me—"

"The decadence of Sol is incredible," snapped Felgi.

"You may be right." Ramacan's tone was mild, but he bristled under the urbane surface. "I've sometimes thought so myself. However, what has that to do with the present subject of discussion—whatever it may be?"

"You left us in exile," said Felgi, and now the wrath and hate were edging his voice, glittering out of his eyes. "For nine hundred years, Earth lived in luxury while the humans on Procyon fought and suf-

fered and died in the worst kind of hell."

"What reason was there for us to go to Procyon?" asked Ramacan. "After the first few ships had established a colony there—well, we had a whole galaxy before us. When no colonial ships came from your star, I suppose it was assumed the people there had died off. Somebody should perhaps have gone there to check up, but it took twenty years to get there and it was an inhospitable and unrewarding system and there were so many other stars. Then the matter creator came along and Sol no longer had a government to look after such things. Space travel became an individual business, and no individual was interested in Procyon." He shrugged. "I'm sorry."

"You're *sorry!*" Felgi spat the words out. "For nine hundred years our ancestors fought the bitterness of their planets, starved and died in misery, sank back almost to barbarism and had to slug their way every step back upwards, waged the cruelest war of history with the Czernigi—unending centuries of war until one race or the other should be exterminated. We died of old age, generation after generation of us—we wrung our needs out of planets never meant for humans—my ship spent twenty years getting back here, twenty years of short human lives—and you're sorry!"

HE SPRANG up and paced the floor, his bitter voice lashing out. "You've had the stars, you've had immortality, you've had everything which can be made of matter. And *we* spent twenty years cramped up in metal walls to get here—wondering if perhaps Sol hadn't fallen on evil times and needed our help!"

"What would you have us do now?" demanded Ramacan. "All Earth has made you welcome—"

"We're a novelty!"

"—all Earth is ready to offer you all

it can. What more do you want of us?"

For a moment the rage was still in Felgi's strange eyes. Then it faded, blinked out as if he had drawn a curtain across them, and he stood still and spoke with sudden quietness. "True. I—I should apologize, I suppose. The nervous strain—"

"Don't mention it," said Ramacan. But inwardly he wondered. Just how far could he trust the Procyonites? All those hard centuries of war and intrigue—and then they weren't really human any more, not the way Earth's dwellers were human—but what else could he do? "It's quite all right. I understand."

"Thank you." Felgi sat down again. "May I ask what you offer?"

"Duplicate matter creators, of course. And robots duplicated, to administer the more complex Rebirth techniques. Certain of the processes involved are beyond the understanding of the human mind."

"I'm not sure it would be a good thing for us," said Felgi. "Sol has gotten stagnant. There doesn't seem to have been any significant change in the last half millennium. Why, our spaceship drives are better than yours."

"What do you expect?" shrugged Ramacan. "What possible incentive have we for change? Progress, to use an archaic term, is a means to an end, and we have reached its goal."

"I still don't know—" Felgi rubbed his chin. "I'm not even sure how your duplicators work."

"I can't tell you much about them. But the greatest technical mind on Earth can't tell you everything. As I told you before, the whole thing is just too immense for real knowledge. Only the electronic brains can handle so much at once."

"Maybe you could give me a short résumé of it, and tell me just what your setup is. I'm especially interested in the actual means by which it's put to use."

"Well, let me see." Ramacan searched

his memory. "The ultrawave was discovered—oh, it must be a good seven or eight hundred years ago now. It carries energy, but it's not electromagnetic. The theory of it, as far as any human can follow it, ties in with wave mechanics.

"The first great application came with the discovery that ultra-waves transmit over distances of many astronomical units, unhindered by intervening matter, and with *no energy loss*. The theory of that has been interpreted as meaning that the wave is, well, I suppose you could say it's 'aware' of the receiver and only goes to it. There must be a receiver as well as a transmitter to generate the wave. Naturally, that led to a perfectly efficient power transmitter. Today all the Solar System gets its energy from the Sun—transmitted by the Power Station on the day side of Mercury. Everything from interplanetary spaceships to televisions and clocks runs from that power source."

"Sounds dangerous to me," said Felgi. "Suppose the station fails?"

"It won't," said Ramacan confidently. "The Station has its own robots, no human technicians at all. Everything is recorded. If any one part goes wrong, it is automatically dissolved into the nearest matter bank and recreated. There are other safeguards too. The Station has never given trouble since it was first built."

"I see—" Felgi's tone was thoughtful.

"Soon thereafter," said Ramacan, "it was found that the ultra-wave could also transmit matter. Circuits could be built which would scan any body atom by atom, dissolve it to energy, and transmit this energy on the ultrawave along with the scanning signal. At the receiver, of course, the process is reversed. I'm grossly oversimplifying, naturally. It's not a mere signal which is involved, but a fantastic complex of signals such as only the ultra-wave could carry. However, you get the general idea. Just about all transportation

today is by this technique. Vehicles for air or space exist only for very special purposes and for pleasure trips."

"You have some kind of controlling center for this too, don't you?"

"Yes. Transmitter Station, on Earth, is in Brazil. It holds all the records of such things as addresses, and it coordinates the millions of units all over the planet. It's a huge, complicated affair, of course, but perfectly efficient. Since distance no longer means anything, it's most practical to centralize the public-service units.

"Well, from transmission it was but a step to recording the signal and reproducing it out of a bank of any other matter. So—the duplicator. The matter creator. You can imagine what that did to Sol's economy! Today everybody owns one, and if he doesn't have a record of what he wants he can have one duplicated and transmitted from Creator Station's great 'library'. Anything whatsoever in the way of material goods is his for the turning of a dial and the flicking of a switch.

"And this, in turn, soon led to the Rebirth technique. It's but an extension of all that has gone before. Your body is recorded at its prime of life, say around twenty years of age. Then you live for as much longer as you care to, say to thirty-five or forty or whenever you begin to get a little old. Then your neural pattern is recorded alone by special scanning units. Memory, as you surely know, is a matter of neural synapses and altered protein molecules, not too difficult to scan and record. This added pattern is superimposed electronically on the record of your twenty-year-old body. Then your own body is used as the matter bank for materializing the pattern in the altered record and—virtually instantaneously—your young body is created—but with all the memories of the old! You're—immortal!"

"In a way," said Felgi. "But it still doesn't seem right to me. The ego, the soul, whatever you want to call it—it

seems as if you lose that. You create simply a perfect copy."

"When the copy is so perfect it cannot be told from the original," said Ramacan, "then what is the difference? The ego is essentially a matter of continuity. You, your essential self, are a constantly changing pattern of synapses bearing only a temporary relationship to the molecules that happen to carry the pattern at the moment. It is the design, not the structural material, that is important. And it is the design that we preserve."

"Do you?" asked Felgi. "I seemed to notice a strong likeness among Earthlings."

"Well, since the records can be altered there was no reason for us to carry around crippled or diseased or deformed bodies," said Ramacan. "Records could be made of perfect specimens and *all* ego-patterns wiped from them; then someone else's neural pattern could be superimposed. Rebirth—in a new body! Naturally, everyone would want to match the prevailing beauty standard, and so a certain uniformity has appeared. A different body would of course lead in time to a different personality, man being a psychosomatic unit. But the continuity which is the essential attribute of the ego would still be there."

"Ummm—I see. May I ask how old you are?"

"About seven hundred and fifty. I was middle-aged when Rebirth was established, but I had myself put into a young body."

FELGI'S eyes went from Ramacan's smooth, youthful face to his own hands, with the knobby joints and prominent veins of his sixty years. Briefly, the fingers tightened, but his voice remained soft. "Don't you have trouble keeping your memories straight?"

"Yes, but every so often I have some of the useless and repetitious ones taken

out of the record, and that helps. The robots know exactly what part of the pattern corresponds to a given memory and can erase it. After, say, another thousand years, I'll probably have big gaps. But they won't be important."

"How about the apparent acceleration of time with age?"

"That was bad after the first couple of centuries, but then it seemed to flatten out, the nervous system adapted to it. I must say, though," admitted Ramacan, "that it as well as lack of incentive is probably responsible for our present static society and general unproductiveness. There's a terrible tendency to procrastination, and a day seems too short a time to get anything done."

"The end of progress, then—of science, or art, of striving, of all which has made man human."

"Not so. We still have our arts and handicrafts and—hobbies, I suppose you could call them. Maybe we don't do so much any more, but—why should we?"

"I'm surprised at finding so much of Earth gone back to wilderness. I should think you'd be badly overcrowded."

"Not so. The creator and the transmitter make it possible for men to live far apart, in physical distance, and still be in as close touch as necessary. Communities are obsolete. As for the population problem, there isn't any. After a few children, not many people want more. It's sort of, well, unfashionable anyway."

"That's right," said Felgi quietly, "I've hardly seen a child on Earth."

"And of course there's a slow drift out to the stars as people seek novelty. You can send your recording in a robot ship, and a journey of centuries becomes nothing. I suppose that's another reason for the tranquility of Earth. The more restless and adventurous elements have moved away."

"Have you any communication with them?"

"None. Not when spaceships can only go at half the speed of light. Once in a while curious wanderers will drop in on us, but it's very rare. They seem to be developing some strange cultures out in the galaxy."

"Don't you do *any* work on Earth?"

"Oh, some public services must be maintained—psychiatry, human technicians to oversee various stations, and so on. And then there are any number of personal-service enterprises—entertainment, especially, and the creation of intricate handicrafts for the creators to duplicate. But there are enough people willing to work a few hours a month or week, if only to fill in their time or to get the credit-balance which will enable them to purchase such services for themselves if they desire.

"It's a perfectly stable culture, General Felgi. It's perhaps the only really stable society in all human history."

"I wonder—haven't you any precautions at all? Any military forces, any defenses against invaders—*anything*?"

"Why in the cosmos should we fear that?" exclaimed Ramacan. "Who would come invading over light-years—at half the speed of light? Or if they did, *why*?"

"Plunder—"

Ramacan laughed. "We could duplicate anything they asked for and give it to them."

"Could you, now?" Suddenly Felgi stood up. "Could you?"

Ramacan rose too, with his nerves and muscles tightening again. There was a hard triumph in the Procyonite's face, vindictive, threatening.

Felgi signaled to his men through the door. They trotted up on the double, and their blasters were raised and something hard and ugly was in their eyes.

"Coördinator Ramacan," said Felgi, "you are under arrest."

"What—what—" The Earthling felt as if someone had struck him a physical blow.

He clutched for support. Vaguely he heard the iron tones:

"You've confirmed what I thought. Earth is unarmed, unprepared, helplessly dependent on a few undefended key spots. And I captain a warship of space filled with soldiers.

"We're taking over!"

CHAPTER TWO

"Tiger, Tiger!"

AVI'S current house lay in North America, on the middle Atlantic seaboard. Like most private homes these days, it was small and low-ceilinged, with adjustable interior walls and furnishings for easy variegation. She loved flowers, and great brilliant gardens bloomed around her dwelling, down toward the sea and landward to the edge of the immense forest which had returned with the end of agriculture.

They walked between the shrubs and trees and blossoms, she and Harol. Her unbound hair was long and bright in the sea breeze, her eighteen-year-old form was slim and graceful as a young deer's. Suddenly he hated the thought of leaving her.

"I'll miss you, Harol," she said.

He smiled lopsidedly. "You'll get over that," he said. "There are others. I suppose you'll be looking up some of those spacemen they say arrived from Procyon a few days ago."

"Of course," she said innocently. "I'm surprised you don't stay around and try for some of the women they had along. It would be a change."

"Not much of a change," he answered. "Frankly, I'm at a loss to understand the modern passion for variety. One person seems very much the same as another in that regard."

"It's a matter of companionship," she said. "After not too many years of living with someone, you get to know him too

well. You can tell exactly what he's going to do, what he'll say to you, what he'll have for dinner and what sort of show he'll want to go to in the evening. These colonists will be—new! They'll have other ways from ours, they'll be able to tell of a new, different planetary system, they'll—" She broke off. "But now so many women will be after the strangers, I doubt if I'll have a chance."

"But if it's conversation you want—oh, well." Harol shrugged. "Anyway, I understand the Procyonites still have family relationships. They'll be quite jealous of their women. And I need this change."

"A carnivore—!" Avi laughed, and Harol thought again what music it was. "You have an original mind, at least." Suddenly she was earnest. She held both his hands and looked close into his eyes. "That's always been what I liked about you, Harol. You've always been a thinker and adventurer, you've never let yourself grow mentally lazy like most of us. After we've been apart for a few years, you're always new again, you've gotten out of your rut and done something strange, you've learned something different, you've grown young again. We've always come back to each other, dear, and I've always been glad of it."

"And I," he said quietly. "Though I've regretted the separations too." He smiled, a wry smile with a tinge of sorrow behind it. "We could have been very happy in the old days, Avi. We would have been married and together for life."

"A few years, and then age and feebleness and death." She shuddered. "Death! Nothingness! Not even the world can exist when one is dead. Not when you've no brain left to know about it. Just—nothing. As if you had never been! Haven't you ever been afraid of the thought?"

"No," he said, and kissed her.

"That's another way you're different,"

she murmured. "I wonder why you never went out to the stars, Harol. All your children did."

"I asked you to go with me, once."

"Not I. I like it here. Life is fun, Harol. I don't seem to get bored as easily as most people. But that isn't answering my question."

"Yes, it is," he said, and then clamped his mouth shut.

He stood looking at her, wondering if he was the last man on Earth who loved a woman, wondering how she really felt about him. Perhaps, in her way, she loved him—they always came back to each other. But not in the way he cared for her, not so that being apart was a gnawing pain and reunion was— No matter.

"I'll still be around," he said. "I'll be wandering through the woods here; I'll have the Rebirth men transmit me back to your house and then I'll be in the neighborhood."

"My pet tiger," she smiled. "Come around to see me once in a while, Harol. Come with me to some of the parties."

A nice spectacular ornament— "No, thanks, But you can scratch my head and feed me big bloody steaks, and I'll arch my back and purr."

They walked hand in hand toward the beach. "What made you decide to be a tiger?" she asked.

"My psychiatrist recommended an animal rebirth," he replied. "I'm getting terribly neurotic, Avi. I can't sit still five minutes and I get gloomy spells where nothing seems worthwhile any more, life is a dreary farce and—well, it seems to be becoming a rather common disorder these days. Essentially it's boredom. When you have everything without working for it, life can become horribly flat. When you've lived for centuries, tried it all hundreds of times—no change, no real excitement, nothing to call forth all that's in you—Anyway, the doctor suggested I go to the stars. When I refused that, he

suggested I change to animal for a while. But I didn't want to be like everyone else. Not an ape or an elephant."

"Same old contrary Harol," she murmured, and kissed him. He responded with unexpected violence.

"A year or two of wild life, in a new and unhuman body, will make all the difference," he said after a while. They lay on the sand, feeling the sunlight wash over them, hearing the lullaby of waves and smelling the clean, harsh tang of sea and salt and many windy kilometers. High overhead a gull circled, white against the blue.

"Won't you change?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. I won't even be able to remember a lot of things I now know. I doubt if even the most intelligent tiger could understand vector analysis. But that won't matter, I'll get it back when they restore my human form. When I feel the personality change has gone as far as is safe, I'll come here and you can send me back to Rebirth. The important thing is the therapy—a change of viewpoint, a new and challenging environment—Avi!" He sat up, on one elbow and looked down at her. "Avi, why don't you come along? Why don't we both become tigers?"

"And have lots of little tigers?" she smiled drowsily. "No, thanks, Harol. Maybe some day, but not now. I'm really not an adventurous person at all." She stretched, and snuggled back against the warm white dune. "I like it the way it is."

And there are those starmen—Sunfire, what's the matter with me? Next thing you know I'll commit an inurbanity against one of her lovers. I need that therapy, all right.

"And then you'll come back and tell me about it," said Avi.

"Maybe not," he teased her. "Maybe I'll find a beautiful tigress somewhere and become so enamored of her I'll never want to change back to human."

"There won't be any tigresses unless

you persuade someone else to go along," she answered. "But will you like a human body after having had such a lovely striped skin? Will we poor hairless people still look good to you?"

"Darling," he smiled, "to me you'll always look good enough to eat."

Presently they went back into the house. The sea gull still dipped and soared, high in the sky.

THE FOREST was great and green and mysterious, with sunlight dappling the shadows and a riot of ferns and flowers under the huge old trees. There were brooks tinkling their darkling way between cool, mossy banks, fish leaping like silver streaks in the bright shallows, lonely pools where quiet hung like a mantle, open meadows of wind-rippled grass, space and solitude and an unending pulse of life.

Tiger eyes saw less than human; the

world seemed dim and flat and colorless until he got used to it. After that he had increasing difficulty remembering what color and perspective were like. And his other senses came alive, he realized what a captive within his own skull he had been—looking out at a world of which he had never been so real a part as now.

He heard sounds and tones no man had ever perceived, the faint hum and chirr of insects, the rustling of leaves in a light, warm breeze, the vague whisper of an owl's wings, the scurrying of small, frightened creatures through the long grass—it all blended into a rich symphony, the heartbeat and breath of the forest. And his nostrils quivered to the infinite variety of smells, the heady fragrance of crushed grass, the pungency of fungus and decay, the sharp, wild odor of fur, the hot drunkenness of newly spilled blood. And he felt with every hair, his whiskers quivered to the smallest stirrings, he gloried in the



ooo

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

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deep, strong play of his muscles—he had come alive, he thought; a man was half dead compared to the vitality that throbbed in the tiger.

At night, at night—there was no darkness for him now. Moonlight was a white, cold blaze through which he stole on feathery feet; the blackest gloom was light to him—shadows, wan patches of luminescence, a shifting, sliding fantasy of gray like an old and suddenly remembered dream.

He laired in a cave he found, and his new body had no discomfort from the damp earth. At night he would stalk out, a huge, dim ghost with only the amber gleam of his eyes for light, and the forest would speak to him with sound and scent and feeling, the taste of game on the wind. He was master then, all the woods shivered and huddled away from him. He was death in black and gold.

Once an ancient poem ran through the human part of his mind, he let the words roll like ominous thunder in his brain and tried to speak them aloud. The forest shivered with the tiger's coughing roar.

*Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forest of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dared frame thy fearful symmetry?*

And the arrogant feline soul snarled response: *I did!*

Later he tried to recall the poem, but he couldn't.

At first he was not very successful, too much of his human awkwardness clung to him. He snarled his rage and bafflement when rabbits skittered aside; when a deer scented him lurking and bolted. He went to Avi's house and she fed him big chunks of raw meat and laughed and scratched him under the chin. She was delighted with her pet.

Avi, he thought, and remembered that he loved her. But that was with his human body. To the tiger, she had no

esthetic or sexual value. But the liked to let her stroke him, he purred like a mighty engine and rubbed against her slim legs. She was still very dear to him, and when he became human again—

But the tiger's instincts fought their way back; the heritage of a million years was not to be denied no matter how much the technicians had tried to alter him. They had accomplished little more than to increase his intelligence, and the tiger nerves and glands were still there.

The night came when he saw a flock of rabbits dancing in the moonlight and pounced on them. One huge, steely-taloned paw swooped down, he felt the ripping flesh and snapping bone and then he was gulping the sweet, hot blood and peeling the meat from the frail ribs. He went wild, he roared and raged all night, shouting his exultance to the pale frosty moon. At dawn he slunk back to his cave, wearied, his human mind a little ashamed of it all. But the next night he was hunting again.

His first deer! He lay patiently on a branch overhanging a trail; only his nervous tail moved while the slow hours dragged by, and he waited. And when the doe passed underneath he was on her like a tawny lightning bolt. A great slapping paw, jaws like shears, a brief, terrible struggle, and she lay dead at his feet. He gorged himself, he ate till he could hardly crawl back to the cave, and then he slept like a drunken man until hunger woke him and he went back to the carcass. A pack of wild dogs were devouring it, he rushed on them and killed one and scattered the rest. Thereafter he continued his feast until only bones were left.

The forest was full of game; it was an easy life for a tiger. But not too easy. He never knew whether he would go back with full or empty belly, and that was part of the pleasure.

They had not removed all the tiger memories; fragments remained to puzzle

him; sometimes he woke up whimpering with a dim wonder as to where he was and what had happened. He seemed to remember misty jungle dawns, a broad brown river shining under the sun, another cave and another striped form beside him. As time went on he grew confused, he thought vaguely that he must once have hunted sambar and seen the white rhinoceros go by like a moving mountain in the twilight. It was growing harder to keep things straight.

That was, of course, only to be expected. His feline brain could not possibly hold all the memories and concepts of the human, and with the passage of weeks and months he lost the earlier clarity of recollection. He still identified himself with a certain sound, "Harol," and he remembered other forms and scenes—but more and more dimly, as if they were the fading shards of a dream. And he kept firmly in mind that he had to go back to Avi and let her send—take?—him somewhere else before he forgot who he was.

Well, there was time for that, thought the human component. He wouldn't lose that memory all at once, he'd know well in advance that the superimposed human personality was disintegrating in its strange house and that he ought to get back. Meanwhile he grew more and deeply into the forest life, his horizons narrowed until it seemed the whole of existence.

Now and then he wandered down to the sea and Avi's home, to get a meal and be made much of. But the visits grew more and more infrequent, the open country made him nervous and he couldn't stay indoors after dark.

Tiger, tiger—

And summer wore on.

HE WOKE to a raw wet chill in the cave, rain outside and a mordant wind blowing through dripping dark trees. He shivered and growled,

unsheathing his claws, but this was not an enemy he could destroy. The day and the night dragged by in misery.

Tigers had been adaptable beasts in the old days, he recalled; they had ranged as far north as Siberia. But his original had been from the tropics. *Hell!* he cursed, and the thunderous roar rattled through the woods.

But then came crisp, clear days with a wild wind hallooing through a high, pale sky, dead leaves whirling on the gusts and laughing in their thin, dry way. Geese honked in the heavens, southward bound, and the bellowing of stags filled the nights. There was a drunkenness in the air; the tiger rolled in the grass and purred like muted thunder and yowled at the huge orange moon as it rose. His fur thickened, he didn't feel the chill except as a keen tingling in his blood. All his senses were sharpened now, he lived with a knife-edged alertness and learned how to go through the fallen leaves like another shadow.

Indian summer, long lazy days like a resurrected springtime, enormous stars, the crisp smell of rotting vegetation, and his human mind remembered that the leaves were like gold and bronze and flame. He fished in the brooks, scooping up his prey with one hooked sweep; he ranged the woods and roared on the high ridges under the moon.

Then the rains returned, gray and cold and sodden, the world drowned in a wet woe. At night there was frost, numbing his feet and glittering in the starlight, and through the chill silence he could hear the distant beat of the sea. It grew harder to stalk game, he was often hungry. By now he didn't mind that too much, but his reason worried about winter. Maybe he'd better get back.

One night the first snow fell, and in the morning the world was white and still. He plowed through it, growling his anger, and wondered about moving south. But

cats aren't given to long journeys. He remembered vaguely that Avi could give him food and shelter.

Avi— For a moment, when he tried to think of her, he thought of a golden, dark-striped body and a harsh feline smell filling the cave above the old wide river. He shook his massive head, angry with himself and the world, and tried to call up her image. The face was dim in his mind, but the scent came back to him, and the low, lovely music of her laughter. He would go to Avi.

He went through the bare forest with the haughty gait of its king, and presently he stood on the beach. The sea was gray and cold and enormous, roaring white-maned on the shore; flying spin-drift stung his eyes. He padded along the strand until he saw her house.

It was oddly silent. He went in through the garden. The door stood open, but there was only desertion inside.

Maybe she was away. He curled up on the floor and went to sleep.

He woke much later, hunger gnawing in his guts, and still no one had come. He recalled that she had been wont to go south for the winter. But she wouldn't have forgotten him, she'd have been back from time to time— But the house had little scent of her, she had been away for a long while. And it was disordered. Had she left hastily?

He went over to the creator. He couldn't remember how it worked, but he did recall the process of dialing and switching. He pulled the lever at random with a paw. Nothing happened.

Nothing! The creator was inert.

He roared his disappointment. Slow, puzzled fear came to him. This wasn't as it should be.

But he was hungry. He'd have to try to get his own food, then, and come back later in hopes of finding Avi. He went back into the woods.

Presently he smelled life under the

snow. Bear. Previously, he and the bears had been in a state of watchful neutrality. But this one was asleep, unwary, and his belly cried for food. He tore the shelter apart with a few powerful motions and flung himself on the animal.

It is dangerous to wake a hibernating bear. This one came to with a start, his heavy paw lashed out and the tiger sprang back with blood streaming down his muzzle.

Madness came, a berserk rage that sent him leaping forward. The bear snarled and braced himself. They closed, and suddenly the tiger was fighting for his very life.

He never remembered that battle save as a red whirl of shock and fury, tumbling in the snow and spilling blood to steam in the cold air. Strike, bite, rip, thundering blows against his ribs and skull, the taste of blood hot in his mouth and the insanity of death shrieking and gibbering in his head!

In the end, he staggered bloodily and collapsed on the bear's ripped corpse. For a long time he lay there, and the wild dogs hovered near, waiting for him to die.

After a while he stirred weakly and ate of the bear's flesh. But he couldn't leave. His body was one vast pain, his feet wobbled under him, one paw had been crushed by the great jaws. He lay by the dead bear under the tumbled shelter, and snow fell slowly on them.

The battle and the agony and the nearness of death brought his old instincts to the fore. All tiger, he licked his tattered form and gulped hunks of rotting meat as the days went by and waited for a measure of health to return.

In the end, he limped back toward his cave. Dreamlike memories nagged him; there had been a house and someone who was good but—but—

He was cold and lame and hungry. Winter had come.

CHAPTER THREE

Dark Victory

"WE HAVE no further use for you," said Felgi, "but in view of the help you've been, you'll be allowed to live—at least till we get back to Procyon and the Council decides your case. Also, you probably have more valuable information about the Solar System than our other prisoners. They're mostly women."

Ramacan looked at the hard, exultant face and answered dully, "If I'd known what you were planning, I'd never have helped."

"Oh, yes, you would have," snorted Felgi. "I saw your reactions when we showed you some of our means of persuasion. You Earthlings are all alike. You've been hiding from death so long that the backbone has all gone out of you. That alone makes you unfit to hold your planet."

"You have the plans of the duplicators and the transmitters and power-beams—all our technology. I helped you get them from the Stations. What more do you want?"

"Earth."

"But why? With the creators and transmitters, you can make your planets like all the old dreams of paradise. Earth is more congenial, yes, but what does environment matter to you now?"

"Earth is still the true home of man," said Felgi. There was a fanaticism in his eyes such as Ramacan had never seen even in nightmare. "It should belong to the best race of man. Also—well, our culture couldn't stand that technology. Procyonite civilization grew up in adversity, it's been nothing but struggle and hardship, it's become part of our nature now. With the Czernigi destroyed, we *must* find another enemy."

Oh, yes, thought Ramacan. It's hap-

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pened before, in Earth's bloody old past. Nations that knew nothing but war and suffering, became molded by them, glorified the harsh virtues that had enabled them to survive. A militaristic state can't afford peace and leisure and prosperity; its people might begin to think for themselves. So the government looks for conquest outside the borders— Needful or not, there must be war to maintain the control of the military.

How human are the Procyonites now? What's twisted them in the centuries of their terrible evolution? They're no longer men, they're fighting robots, beasts of prey, they have to have blood.

"You saw us shell the Stations from space," said Felgi. "Rebirth, Creator, Transmitter—they're radioactive craters now. Not a machine is running on Earth, not a tube is alight—nothing! And with the creators on which their lives depended inert, Earthlings will go back to utter savagery."

"Now what?" asked Ramacan wearily. "We're standing off Mercury, refueling," said Felgi. "Then it's back to Procyon. We'll use our creator to record most of the crew, they can take turns being briefly recreated during the voyage to maintain the ship and correct the course. We'll be little older when we get home."

"Then, of course, the Council will send out a fleet with recorded crews. They'll take over Sol, eliminate the surviving population, and recolonize Earth. After that—" The mad fires blazed high in his eyes. "The stars! A galactic empire, ultimately."

"Just so you can have war," said Ramacan tonelessly. "Just so you can keep your people stupid slaves."

"That's enough," snapped Felgi. "A decadent culture can't be expected to understand our motives."

Ramacan stood thinking. There would still be humans around when the Procyon-

ites came back. There would be forty years to prepare. Men in spaceships, here and there throughout the System, would come home, would see the ruin of Earth and know who must be guilty. With creators, they could rebuild quickly, they could arm themselves, duplicate vengeance-hungry men by the millions.

Unless Solarian man was so far gone in decay that he was only capable of blind panic. But Ramacan didn't think so. Earth had slipped, but not that far.

Felgi seemed to read his mind. There was cruel satisfaction in his tones: "Earth will have no chance to rearm. We're using the power from Mercury Station to run our own large duplicator, turning rock into osmium fuel for our engines. But when we're finished, we'll blow up the Station too. Spaceships will drift powerless, the colonists on the planets will die as their environmental regulators stop functioning, no wheel will turn in all the Solar System. That, I should think, will be the final touch!"

Indeed, indeed. Without power, without tools, without food or shelter, the final collapse would come. Nothing but a few starveling savages would be left when the Procyonites returned. Ramacan felt an emptiness within himself.

Life had become madness and nightmare. The end. . . .

"You'll stay here till we get around to recording you," said Felgi. He turned on his heel and walked out.

RAMACAN slumped back into a seat. His desperate eyes traveled around and around the bare little cabin that was his prison, around and around like the crazy whirl of his thoughts. He looked at the guard who stood in the doorway, leaning on his blaster, contemptuously bored with the captive. If—if— O almighty gods, if that was to inherit green Earth!

What to do, what to do? There must

be some answer, some way, no problem was altogether without solution. Or was it? What guarantee did he have of cosmic justice? He buried his face in his hands.

I was a coward, he thought. I was afraid of pain. So I rationalized, I told myself they probably didn't want much, I used my influence to help them get duplicators and plans. And the others were cowards too, they yielded, they were cravenly eager to help the conquerors—and this is our pay!

What to do, what to do? If somehow the ship were lost, if it never came back—The Procyonites would wonder. They'd send another ship or two—no more—to investigate. And in forty years Sol could be ready to meet those ships—ready to carry the war to an unprepared enemy—if in the meantime they'd had a chance to rebuild, if Mercury Power Station were spared—

But the ship would blow the Station out of existence, and the ship would return with news of Sol's ruin, and the invaders would come swarming in—would go ravening out through an unsuspecting galaxy like a spreading plague—

How to stop the ship—*now?*

Ramacan grew aware of the thudding of his heart; it seemed to shake his whole body with its violence. And his hands were cold and clumsy, his mouth was parched, he was afraid.

He got up and walked over toward the guard. The Procyonite hefted his blaster, but there was no alertness in him, he had no fear of an unarmed member of the conquered race.

He'll shoot me down, thought Ramacan. The death I've been running from all my life is on me now. But it's been a long life and a good one, and better to finish it now than drag out a few miserable years as their despised prisoner, and—and—I hate their guts!

"What do you want?" asked the Procyonite.

"I feel sick," said Ramacan. His voice was almost a whisper in the dryness of his throat. "Let me out."

"Get back."

"It'll be messy. Let me go to the lavatory."

He stumbled, nearly falling. "Go ahead," said the guard curtly. "I'll be along, remember."

Ramacan swayed on his feet as he approached the man. His shaking hands closed on the blaster barrel and yanked the weapon loose. Before the guard could yell, Ramacan drove the butt into his face. A remote corner of his mind was shocked at the savagery that welled up in him when the bones crunched.

The guard toppled. Ramacan eased him to the floor, slugged him again to make sure he would lie quiet, and stripped him of his long outer coat, his boots, and helmet. His hands were really trembling now; he could hardly get the simple garments on.

If he was caught—well, it only made a few minutes' difference. But he was still afraid. Fear screamed inside him.

He forced himself to walk with nightmare slowness down the long corridor. Once he passed another man, but there was no discovery. When he had rounded the corner, he was violently sick.

He went down a ladder to the engine room. Thank the gods he'd been interested enough to inquire about the layout of the ship when they first arrived! The door stood open and he went in.

A couple of engineers were watching the giant creator at work. It pulsed and hummed and throbbed with power, energy from the sun and from dissolving atoms of rocks—atoms recreated as the osmium that would power the ship's engines on the long voyage back. Tons of fuel spilling down into the bins.

Ramacan closed the soundproof door and shot the engineers.

Then he went over to the creator and

reset the controls. It began to manufacture plutonium.

He smiled then, with an immense relief, an incredulous realization that he had won. He sat down and cried with sheer joy.

The ship would not get back. Mercury Station would endure. And on that basis, a few determined men in the Solar System could rebuild. There would be horror on Earth, howling chaos, most of its population would plunge into savagery and death. But enough would live, and remain civilized, and get ready for revenge.

Maybe it was for the best, he thought. Maybe Earth really had gone into a twilight of purposeless ease. True it was that there had been none of the old striving and hoping and gallantry which had made man what he was. No art, no science, no adventure—a smug self-satisfaction, an unreal immortality in a synthetic paradise. Maybe this shock and challenge was what Earth needed, to show the starward way again.

As for him, he had had many centuries of life, and he realized now what a deep inward weariness there had been in him. *Death*, he thought, *death is the longest voyage of all. Without death there is no evolution, no real meaning to life, the ultimate adventure has been snatched away.*

There had been a girl once, he remembered, and she had died before the rebirth machines became available. Odd—after all these centuries he could still remember how her hair had rippled in the wind, one day on a high summery hill. He wondered if he would see her.

He never felt the explosion as the plutonium reached critical mass.

AVI'S feet were bleeding. Her shoes had finally given out, and rocks and twigs tore at her feet. The snow was dappled with blood.

Weariness clawed at her, she couldn't keep going—but she had to, she had to,

she was afraid to stop in the wilderness.

She had never been alone in her life. There had always been the televisions and the transmitters, no place on Earth had been more than an instant away. But the world had expanded into immensity, the machines were dead, there was only cold and gloom and empty white distances. The world of warmth and music and laughter and casual enjoyment was as remote and unreal as a dream.

Was it a dream? Had she always stumbled sick and hungry through a nightmare world of leafless trees and drifting snow and wind that sheathed her in cold through the thin rags of her garments? Or was this the dream, a sudden madness of horror and death?

Death—no, no, no, she couldn't die, she was one of the immortals, she mustn't die!

The wind blew and blew.

Night was falling, winter night. A wild dog bayed, somewhere out in the gloom. She tried to scream, but her throat was raw with shrieking; only a dry croak would come out.

Help me, help me, help me.

Maybe she should have stayed with the man. He had devised traps, had caught an occasional rabbit or squirrel and flung her the leavings. But he looked at her so strangely when several days had gone by without a catch. He would have killed her and eaten her; she had to flee.

Run, run, run— She couldn't run, the forest reached on forever, she was caught in cold and night, hunger and death.

What had happened, what had happened, what had become of the world? What would become of her?

She had liked to pretend she was one of the ancient goddesses, creating what she willed out of nothingness, served by a huge and eternal world whose one purpose was to serve her. Where was that world now?

Hunger twisted in her like a knife. She

tripped over a snow-buried log and lay there, trying feebly to rise.

We were too soft, too complacent, she thought dimly. We lost all our powers, we were just little parasites on our machines. Now we're unfit—

No! I won't have it! I was a goddess once—

Spoiled brat, jeered the demon in her mind. Baby crying for its mother. You should be old enough to look after yourself—after all these centuries. You shouldn't be running in circles waiting for a help that will never come, you should be helping yourself, making a shelter, finding nuts and roots, building a trap. But you can't. All the self-reliance has withered out of you.

No—help, help, help—

Something moved in the gloom. She choked a scream. Yellow eyes glowed like twin fires, and the immense form stepped noiselessly forth.

For an instant she gibbered in a madness of fear, and then sudden realization came and left her gaping with unbelief—then instant eager acceptance.

There could only be one tiger in this forest.

"Harol," she whispered, and climbed to her feet. "Harol."

It was all right. The nightmare was over. Harol would look after her. He would hunt for her, protect her, bring her back to the world of machines that

must still exist. "Harol," she cried. "Harol, my dear—"

The tiger stood motionless; only his twitching tail had life. Briefly, irrelevantly, remembered sounds trickled through his mind: "Your basic mentality should be stable for a year or two, barring accidents. . . ." But the noise was meaningless, it slipped through his brain into oblivion.

He was hungry. The crippled paw hadn't healed well, he couldn't catch game.

Hunger, the most elemental need of all, grinding within him, filling his tiger brain and tiger body until nothing else was left.

He stood looking at the thing that didn't run away. He had killed another a while back—he licked his mouth at the thought.

From somewhere long ago he remembered that the thing had once been—he had been—he couldn't remember—

He stalked forward.

"Harol," said Avi. There was fear rising horribly in her voice.

The tiger stopped. He knew that voice. He remembered—he remembered—

He had known her once. There was something about her that held him back.

But he was hungry. And his instincts were clamoring in him.

But if only he could remember, before it was too late—

Time stretched into a horrible eternity while they stood facing each other—the lady and the tiger.

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The crane arm swung viciously up and down like a gigantic fist. . .

HALF-

LIFE

He was not quite human, not quite alive, the thing-in-a-bottle that guarded the lonely planetoid . . . yet when the vandals came, he knew that—he would die as well as any man!

By ALFRED COPPEL

T-51 WAS alone on Planetoid M3225 when the strange spaceship finally landed. He watched it with a mixture of bafflement and growing anxiety. The radar-watch had warned him hours ago of its approach, and he had taken the prescribed measures for protection of the Pile Station. Only they hadn't worked.

First he had radioed the form warning. The strange craft had given no indication of receiving it. Then, reluctantly, he had launched the interceptors. The tiny missiles had flashed out into space, seeking the spaceship hungrily. But there had been no explosion. There was only one explanation. The occupants of the spacer had access to SPC information. T-51 had faintly felt the contra-radar impulses reaching out to shatter the interceptors' proximity fuses.

So in the first moves of his first test T-51 had failed. The spaceship was landing on M3225, where no unauthorized craft should ever be permitted to land. And all he could do was watch.

SPC had warned him years ago that he

might one day, in the course of his duty tour as a Stationmaster, meet a situation like this. Solar Peace Commission was not an inviolate organization. Information could leak. Even such vital intelligence as the method used to cripple a Pile Station's defenses.

It was inevitable, T-51 conceded, that sooner or later someone would get the urge to loot a Station. The radio-isotopes stored beneath him were valuable enough to make a dozen men wealthy, and then there were the fissionable fuels the pile produced. There were still people who thought of these in terms of how many cities they would raze, and were willing to pay accordingly. It was enough to tempt anyone—except a Stationmaster. A brain in a tank had little use for wealth.

T-51 watched the ship settle to the rocky soil of the planetoid. A vague wistfulness colored his anxiety. Long ago, before the crash that had shattered his body, he had been a spaceman. The sight of a ship coming down out of the sky touched a nostalgic chord. For a moment he almost regretted his gift of mechanical life. Human contacts were rare in a Pile Station, and when they did come the Stationmaster became painfully aware that he was no longer really a man. He felt disembodied—and very much alone.

A circle of light appeared in the spaceship's flank as the valve swung open. Five men filed out. They wore spacesuits, even though M3225 had an atmosphere of sorts and respirators would have served. That told T-51 something. With unconscious precision, he filed the information away for future consideration. M3225 was strange to them. They carried a Munssen cutter, too. That meant they lacked the valve-lock combination. So the only SPC information they had was the contra-radar impulse patterns used to neutralize the interceptors. T-51 brought himself to a full stop abruptly. He was taking a good deal for granted. He couldn't be sure of what these men knew. It was a fair chance that they knew nothing about the nature of the Stationmasters—that was one of SPC's most closely guarded secrets. But so far, he had no assurance that these five didn't know.

One thing was certain, however. These men were killers. They wore their electro-blasters easily and with confidence. And their intent couldn't have been clearer if they had painted a skull and crossbones on their ship.

They seemed to feel themselves under surveillance. These men were not swallowing the stories SPC circulated about the Pile Stations being fully automatic.

The stories were foolish—and necessary. Foolish, because anyone with brains enough to understand the workings of a Station would know it needed the guidance of a human intelligence. And necessary, because it was an *a priori* assumption among the rarified minds of upper-level SPC that the people of the Earth-Venus-Mars Triangle would never accept the reality of the Stationmasters.

A Station was powerful; except for others of its kind, it was the most powerful thing in the Solar System. Therefore it could not be entrusted to a *man*. Only a Stationmaster could be trusted, for they were trustworthy by hard necessity. A dis-

embodied brain was just helpless enough for the realists of the Peace Commission. Added to that was the safeguard of the contra-radar impulse patterns that could render the Stationmasters' only defenses impotent—just in case a Stationmaster, who was partly human at least, should run wild.

And so because of this fragmentary distrust of the whole man for the exotic, T-51 lay in his tank within the Station, conscious of his trust, but vulnerable and filled with growing fear. As the men filed across the jagged landscape toward the Station, he took inventory of his situation.

Item. The Station itself. A sphere, half embedded in the soil of the planetoid. The skin of the sphere was thin. There was no need for it to be otherwise. But now it would give little protection. The Munssen cutter would slice into it easily. The Station was to T-51 what his human body had once been, and the thought of the cutter chilled him. There would be no pain, of course, but he still thought in the same way that a man did.

Item. The innards of the Station. No weapons. There were only machines—none meant to inflict harm on human beings. Lathes, cranes, cutters. A few possibilities there, but certainly no match for blasters.

Item. The pile. The thought of trying to use the pile as a weapon was frightening. He could make it deadly by letting it reach critical mass, that would end the threat from the intruders. But it would destroy the Station as well. The ultimate weapon, but completely unsuited to the task at hand.

Item. The radio. A call for help was indicated. Only help could not arrive in time. The nearest SPC sub-base at this time of year was Callisto, twenty hours away for the fastest cruiser. If these men could not do what they intended within the next three hours, T-51 misjudged them badly.

T-51 WATCHED unhappily as the men set up their cutter near the curving wall of the sphere. The trouble was, he reflected bitterly, that he was faced with an unforeseen situation. He was under attack in a manner that had never been expected. And he felt closed in, impotent, trapped.

The long years spent in the solitude of the planetoid, with little or no human contact, these years had changed him. He was thinking like a machine, without resourcefulness, without the spark of genius that made a *man* unique.

With a great effort, he forced his thinking into more fruitful channels. It would do no good to lie inert, filled with self-pity. That way lay failure and death—

Death. Actually, a machine could not die. But he was not entirely a machine. He was a synthesis of human mind and metallic sinews. The Station was not only his sacred trust. It was his body. *His body*. That set the pattern of resistance for him. If they got in—

But first, he thought, he must try to stop their entry. The proverbial ounce of prevention was better than the cure. The cure might be fatal.

They were directly under one of his external telescreens, and the Munssen was beginning to glow. There was not much point, then, in trying to maintain the fiction of the "automatic" Station. A Station without occupants would merely make them greedier. So he must show himself to them. This, he was willing to do. Indirectly.

T-51 activated the outside speakers.

"You are warned that this Station is under the protection of the Solar Peace Commission! Trespassing may be punished by a fine of ten thousand dollars or ten years' imprisonment or both! Return immediately to your vessel!"

The suddenness of the outburst startled the men, but little more. Threats of fines or imprisonment meant nothing to this

type. Most likely they were all in line for such attentions from the Triangle government in any case. What did interest them was that someone within the Station had again taken note of their activities. The sporadic efforts at defense gave them confidence. They redoubled their efforts with the Munssen. T-51 watched regretfully.

He called the sub-base on Callisto and informed the Controller thereof his situation. It was a formality. There was nothing Callisto could do for him, though they promised help within the needed twenty hours' travel time. By the time the SPC cruiser arrived on M3225 the issue would have been decided long ago, but both T-51 and the Controller contrived to ignore that obvious fact.

The hungry flame of the cutter had sliced away an opening in the Station's skin by the time T-51 finished his transmission. The five men were inside.

The interior telescreens picked them up immediately. They operated by black light, and the helmet lights of the intruders looked red and angry.

T-51 tuned a receiver to the helmet-phone frequency and listened to the looters' talk.

"Spread out and search the place. Find the living quarters first." The one who spoke seemed to be the leader. T-51 wished he could have smiled. *Living quarters*. Then, they didn't know what a Stationmaster was. They expected a whole man. Naturally. So far, so good. They'd look a long time before finding any living quarters.

The men fanned out across the broad floor of the first deck, searching every nook and cranny with their blasters ready. The thoroughness of their search was not conceived to give the Stationmaster a sense of security. These men meant business.

"We've covered the whole deck. Nothing. Nothing at all. I don't see how anyone can work here." A spacesuited figure

made a sweeping gesture with his armored hand. "No light. No real air. What goes, anyway?"

"Don't worry. Someone's running this place. Find him and we have the key."

"What about the lower levels?"

"We'll try that next. This is all storage."

"Have you noticed that none of the machines have a place for a man?" A third man spoke from the far end of the warehouse deck, and T-51's anxiety flared.

"Meaning what?"

"Look for yourself. There are loading cranes on trucks here, but not one of them has a cab—"

That was too close to home. The threat of discovery loomed and T-51 acted rashly. A remotely controlled loading crane swung soundlessly across the dark deck.

"Look out!" The cry was animal-shrill, and it ended in a liquid scream of mixed terror and pain. The crane arm swung viciously up and down like a gigantic fist in the darkness of the warehouse. A lancet of crackling blue fire streaked the gloom and corruscated briefly on the loading crane. The metal arm sagged helplessly as the electro-bolt melted its base.

T-51 withdrew the crane into the shadows. The man had been quick—almost too quick. He cursed himself for his weakness. The threat of discovery had prodded him into an unwise move. The crane was crippled, useless. Now, he must wait and see what the intruders could deduce from his frenetic outburst.

"What happened?"

"Something's happened to Arnt!" The voices were harsh and fearful.

"Arnt!"

No reply.

"Find him!"

The men spread out again, their helmet lights bobbing like fireflies in the tele-screens. Presently they found their companion. He lay sprawled amid a clutter of shattered packing cases. He wasn't a pret-

ty sight. The crane had done a thorough job.

"My God!"

The crane arm had almost decapitated him, T-51 noted sickly, yet he had been able to fire a bolt at the crane as he fell.

"What was it? What could have done this?" There was a note of hysteria in one of the voices.

"Get hold of yourself, Gorman!" The leader's sharp tone carried a stinging rebuke.

THE STATIONMASTER shuddered inwardly. He had killed a man, brutally. He'd never killed before. Yet he had struck blindly and with savage fury at the threat of discovery. That was not a machine-like reaction. He had acted exactly as a frightened man would have acted.

He forced himself to take stock again. This time the inventory was shorter. Item. The intruders were inside the Station. They were inside his *body*. He had killed one of them, but there were still four left. And they would be on guard and deadly now. What should be his pattern of defense, then? What would he have done before—when he'd been a whole man and not just a brain in a tank?

He felt actually sick. His body was no longer his own. It had been invaded. Like a human body under attack by disease, the Pile Station was ready to fight. But how?

Analogy. That was the key, T-51 thought thickly. How did any body fight off disease? First, with antibodies. Phagocytes that gathered at the point of infection. For him; then, what were the antibodies? That was easy. The machines. The crane. The cutters. He had reacted normally, then. He had been threatened and he had struck back. And would again.

"From here on, we stick together," the leader said, "And we find whoever's running this place. That's first!"

"What about—Arnt?"

"Leave him here." Then with deliberate brutality, "He won't run away."

"That's rotten, King!"

"Tough. Arnt knew what his chances were."

King, T-51 knew that name. Piracy was rare in space, and its practitioners were few. But King was known as a master looter. A killer.

"What now?"

"We try the lower levels. He has to be hiding somewhere."

They made their way toward the descending ramp and filed into it. T-51 watched them carefully. The next deck was the machine-shop. He made ready to fight again, and this time without conscience.

"There's something peculiar about this ramp." It was the one called Gorman who spoke.

"What, for instance?"

"Too narrow, and too low. And these tracks on the deck."

They made their way through the dark passageway carefully, helmet lights bobbing with each booted stride.

"You're right, Gorman. I—I don't like it."

"If you don't like it," King's voice came harsh and clear, "Get back to the ship and wait for the rest of us there."

"I don't want to go back alone," the man's voice was plaintive. King laughed

insultingly the sound ringing in the sphere.

"You're a yellow one, Krieg."

"Shut up." The retort was sullen.

"What about you, Lohman?"

"I'm still here."

T-51 listened and took note. There was no love lost among the four. They all hated King. But they'd fight together. He couldn't rely on less.

They reached the machine-shop deck and T-51 marshaled his antibodies.

Gorman stepped out of the ramp tunnel and T-51 struck. A great gout of flame spewed out of the darkness. It caught Gorman squarely, setting fire to the rubber portions of his spacesuit and heating the metal parts to cherry red. His agonized scream cut through the Station.

His face contorted hideously behind the blackening faceplate, Gorman danced insanely in a tarantella of anguish, his clumsy armored figure wreathed in fire.

The others pushed out of the ramp behind him and scattered. King's plaster streaked bluish flame and the rolling oxy-hydrogen cutter shattered in a ball of greasy lightning. Its parts clattered against the steelite walls of the Station like metallic hail. Gorman collapsed to the deck, rolling wildly to and fro on the deck, his white-hot spacesuit smoking. His shrieking was a continuous ululation of torment.

King got to his feet and stood over the

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dying man. The face that looked up at him with burnt, unseeing eyes through the cracked and warped faceplate was inhuman. King steadied his blaster and shot away Gorman's head. The cooked body twitched fitfully and was still.

"Oh, God . . . oh, God. . . !" The one called Kreig stood unsteadily staring at the thing that had been Gorman. "Did you see it? Did you see it? Oh, God, oh God!"

"Shut up!" King's nerves were frayed, his voice unsteady.

Lohman was kneeling against the wall, retching emptily into his faceplate.

"That cutter, King! Oh God did you see it? It killed him, King! *It . . . it . . . was alive! It killed him! Oh, God!*" Krieg was blubbling hysterically.

King looked about him into the shadows. Parts of the cutter he had blasted still flickered faintly with sparks, but the greater part of the huge machine-shop was in darkness.

"Krieg, you're a fool. That thing was remote-controlled. We're being watched. Every minute." He looked about him again like an animal at bay, hate in his eyes. *Something* in this Station had made him afraid, and he hated it.

"Smash the place. Pulverize everything in it!"

Groping blindly, King had almost hit on the truth, T-51 realized. They were going to strip his weapons from him, they were going to take away his antibodies, and leave him in helplessness. He had cut down their number to three. But he was still alone, and the Station, his trust and his body, was going to be taken from him. He watched the lancing streaks of fire crisscrossing in the gloom and heard the bubbling hiss of metal sagging into shapelessness. Even the telescreens were smashed in the frenzy of destruction. He felt blindness close in around him and with it a sudden flash of claustrophobic terror.

T-51 LAY inert and afraid. It was more than just dying. He was failing. As a Stationmaster he had had a reason for existing, but now, ravaged by looters and helpless—

Think. *Think!* There had to be a way, he told himself. They were on the deck above him. Soon they would come down. They would find his hiding-place. The reality of his vulnerability was like the cold breath of space. They would find him. Their gloved hands would crush and mangle the pulpy gray mass. The thought was hideous. He had fought and done well—but he must do better. Or die.

Analogy. Again. What would a human body do now? The phagocytes were destroyed. Was there another weapon? Fever. T-51 struggled with the concept. What would serve a machine for fever? Radiation? But there was a catch. He knew that they—in their armored suits—could stand more radiation than he. Still, it was the ultimate weapon. He had no choice. But first, he must protect himself as best he could.

On the machine-shop deck the carnival of destruction continued unabated. On the deserted warehouse deck a tiny work machine began to move about. Swiftly, it found what it sought. Whirring softly, it picked up the pliant metal sheets and rolled for the ramp. It skirted the mutilated body of the first looter almost unconsciously. It slipped into the down-sloping tunnel and vanished.

Presently, it emerged again, this time on the machine-shop deck. Clinging to the wall, it sped through the kaleidoscopic nightmare lit by the blaster flashes of King and the other two. It had almost reached the descending ramp when it was discovered.

"There! Something's still moving! *Blast it!*" King yelled hoarsely.

A converging triangle of electro-blasts met on the wall above the tiny work-machine.

"Kill it! Kill it!"

The machine dodged and vanished into the ramp tunnel. A ricochet had creased the metal sheets it carried and a streak of the bright stuff puddled at the entrance to the ramp. King ran to it clumsily.

"Lead!" He signaled the others to follow him. "Follow it!" He shoved Lohman and Krieg through the opening ahead of him. Then he raised his wrist to his face-plate. The Geiger counter inbedded there was clicking. As he listened, the clicks came faster. The needle that indicated cumulative radiation was climbing out of the green zone toward the red. With a curse, he flung himself down the ramp after his men.

T-51 picked them up on his final bank of telescreens. They were clattering down the ramp close behind the little work machine. A helpless terror crept through him. They were close. So close!

He switched to the small screen on the work machine. He could see the circular pillar that housed his own tank now. The tiny machine darted for it, all hope of concealment gone. An electro-bolt scorched the tire from one of the ma-

chine's rear wheel-trucks and it began to limp painfully.

The Geiger counter within his pillar told him that activity in the pile was increasing rapidly. Sheaths had been removed and the deadly radiation was cutting through the whole Station.

Swiftly, T-51 slid aside a section of his pillar. The work machine slid through and the section closed as swiftly. Krieg and Lohman pulled up in bafflement. King was coming up behind them, blaster poised.

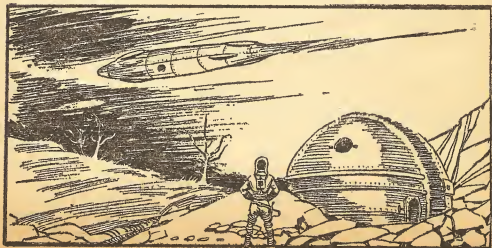
Within the pillar, the work machine began to operate swiftly. The Geiger counter was chattering a song of terror. T-51 increased the flow of his mechanical heart and let minute doses of adrenalin trigger through tiny valves into his blood supply.

"King! The Geigers! Look!" Lohman held his indicator before King's fury-contorted face. "The needle's into the black!"

"Blast that pillar!" T-51 could hear King's voice, it was that of a man insane with rage.

"The Geiger!" Lohman shrieked, "Let's get out!"

By the time the SP cruiser arrived the issue would have been decided. . . .



"I said blast that pillar!"

"I—I'm getting out! Radiation—I!"

T-51 saw Lohman break for the ramp in panic. King whirled and cut him down with a searing bolt. He toppled grotesquely and came to rest propped crazily against the wall.

KING was mad with fury, for he had been balked by an unknown thing, and he was filled with only one desire. The wealth of the Station no longer concerned him. He wanted only to kill.

The radiation counter within the pillar was screaming. The very ions of the air had begun to glow.

King turned his blaster on the pillar, and the portal vanished in a shower of greenish sparks. T-51 felt naked. The work machine made a move toward King, but he blasted it into smoking shards. T-51 was alone.

"Bring your light in here, Krieg!"

"King, I'm—I'm sick." Krieg stumbled slightly and King caught him.

"What is that thing?" King stared at the lead sheath that the work machine had made around T-51's tank. He kicked at the filligree network of metal neurons that fanned out from under the shield. T-51 felt agony as the booted foot crushed sensitive synapses.

King stood uncertainly in the glowing radioactive fog. He felt cheated. He had expected something more than just . . . *this*.

The sickness was finding King now, T-51 knew. He felt it himself. Under the thin sheathing, the cells of his cortex were staggering.

Krieg stumbled again and sank slowly to his knees. King watched him uncertainly. The Geiger counter needle on his wrist stood well into the black. Fatal radiation. In the light of his helmet lamp, the lead-sheathed tank before him gleamed brightly. He was having trouble understanding

what had happened. He raised his blaster and pointed it at the tank.

His hand wavered as a wracking pain shot through his abdomen. A churning, seething nausea shook him.

T-51 fought off the weakness that pulsed through him in great flooding waves. Why didn't they die?

Krieg slid forward into the deck, writhing, his entrails cooked by the lethal bombardment. His electro-blaster rolled out of his outstretched hand. King took a faltering step toward the tank, his weapon still held ready. He shot. The blast seared away one side of the tank's sheathing and King could see the gray mass floating in the sealed plastic. He stared, a sick hungry hate throbbing in him as he began to understand what T-51 was. A paroxysm shook him and he was violently sick.

T-51 shuddered under the impact of the radiation. Automatically, he damped the pile and the Geiger stopped chattering. He had done all he could. He had fought and now he could only wait for death like—like a man.

King tottered unsteadily. The glowing fog in the chamber had faded, leaving only the dim radiance of his helmet light. He raised his blaster for another shot . . .

Abruptly, his knees collapsed. He glared helplessly at the floating brain of the Stationmaster and dropped the blaster. He felt no pain, but his flesh was peeling away from his bones in ugly strips, he could feel it sagging against the fabric of his spacesuit. With a convulsive movement, he pitched forward over the body of his companion and was still.

T-51 damped the pile further and rested. Gradually the pain of his ruptured synapses eased and a sense of well-being stole over him. He lay quiescent, waiting for the technicians that would come aboard the SPC cruiser to mend his mutilated body. If he could have smiled, he would have. He was still the Stationmaster, after all.



The TITAN'S GOBLET

By LILITH LORRAINE

Drink from the Titan's goblet,
You who would ravish space,
Drink till you reel and stagger
Drink till your pulses race

With the wine that was brewed of moon-blood
At the edge of the chaos-brink,
For all that the gods have left you
Is the chalice—and the Drink.

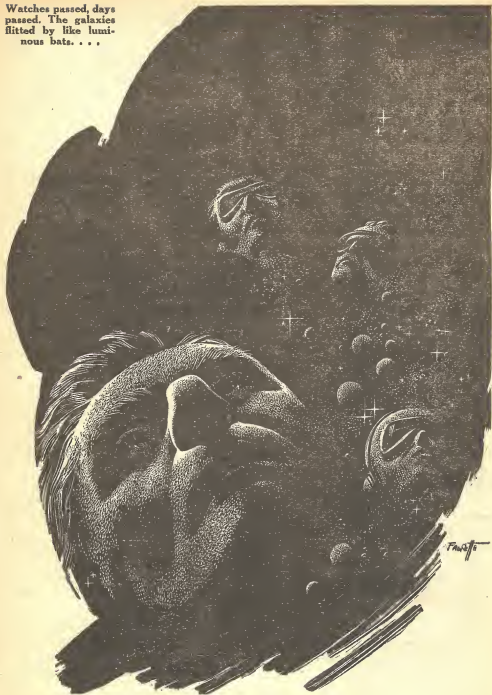
Touch your lips to the chalice
Before you quaff your fill,
Savor the mellow cities,
Crunch their bones if you will.

Taste of the tall ships floating,
They—they—are only foam,
But the wild sharp tang of the waters,
And the bells in a sunken dome

Lure you to drink still deeper,
Till your mind is the Titan's mind,
Till you whirl through the stars unshackled
By the earth you leave behind.

Drink till the moons melt madly
Under your kiss like snow,
But never ask in your wine-cups,
Where did the Titans go?

Watches passed, days
passed. The galaxies
flitted by like lumi-
nous bats. . . .



By
JOHN HOLBROOK

ULTIMATE QUEST

From the threshold of forever they blasted off on Man's ultimate quest—a strange one-way journey that might make them a blazing star, lost forever to their own galaxy—or Man's symbol of hope for eternal conquest!

CHIRAM came into the room, walked with short, firm steps to the desk, sat down. Only then did he appear to notice the two dozen men and women seated on neat rows of folding chairs.

"I can give you about twenty minutes," said Chiram. "Exactly what do you want?"

"How about a short statement?" suggested Ed Jeff of All-Planet News-Fax. "Then perhaps you'd answer a few questions."

Chiram leaned back, a stocky middle-aged man with an air of decision. He had a leonine ruff of hair the color and texture of steel wool, eyes sharp and monitory, a heavy well-shaped mouth. His clothes were gray and dark blue—conservative but informal, as if Chiram dressed by habit, uninfluenced by either vanity or ostentation.

"My associates and I," he said, "financed by Jay Banners, have embarked on a program of research which will ultimately lead to an attempted circumnavigation of the universe." He stopped; the reporters waited. Chiram said drily, "That is the statement."

Voices collided and tumbled getting to

Chiram's ears. He held up his hand. "One at a time . . . You, sir—what was your question?"

"You said circumnavigation of the universe? Not merely the galaxy?"

Chiram nodded. "The universe."

"How do you know it's round?"

"We don't," said Chiram, smiling grimly. "There is no first-hand evidence, very little mathematical indication, one way or another. It's an assumption on which we're staking our lives."

The reporters made respectful sounds. Chiram relaxed a trifle. "Estimates of the circumference run in the neighborhood of ten to a hundred billion light years. We plan to set out from Earth, assume a course—almost any course. After a sufficient period of flying, at a sufficiently high speed, we hope to return from the opposite direction."

"What're the chances of hitting Earth on the way back?"

Chiram compressed his lips; the question had been put in what he considered a light tone.

"In theory," he replied stiffly, "if we steer a sufficiently exact course, we will return automatically. Our research program is concentrating on the mechanics

of straight flight. A hundredth of a second error at a hundred billion light years means three hundred thousand light years. If we missed the home galaxy by that margin we'd be lost forever. Our first problem is to guarantee ourselves a mathematically straight course."

"Can't you line up on stars ahead or behind?"

Chiram shook his head. "The light from behind can't catch up with us; in fact, we'll overtake it and add the images of the stars behind to those of the stars ahead." He clasped his blunt hands on the desk. "That is our second problem: seeing. Our speed will approximate instantaneity. Assuming ninety percent efficiency in our destiation field, an average speed of six or seven thousand light years a second will take us a hundred billion light years in six months. The impact of radiation on an unshielded object at this speed would be cataclysmic. The weakest infra-red light would be compacted by a kind of Döppler effect to cosmic rays; ordinary visible light would become a thousand times harder, more energetic, and cosmic rays would strike at a frequency of ten to the thirty-first or thirty-second power. I can't imagine the effect of radiation like that, but I know it would hurt. We are trying to develop a system of vision that can function under this tremendous impact. Longitudinal sight will be normal, of course, with light striking the side of our ship at normal frequencies."

"How long will it take to lick these problems?"

Chiram said in a measured voice, "We are making satisfactory progress."

"How will you know for sure when you've returned? One galaxy must look a lot like another. . . ."

Chiram drummed his fingers on the table. "That's a good question. I'm sorry to say I have no precise answer. We will trust to alertness, and careful examina-

tion of any galaxy in our path which shows the proper size and configuration. The fact that our galaxy is roughly double the average size will help us. We shall have to trust a good deal to luck."

"Suppose the universe isn't spherical, but infinite?"

Chiram fixed the man with a contemptuous stare. "You're talking foolishness. How can I answer that question?"

The reporter hurriedly corrected himself. "What I meant, will you set a limit to the time before you turn around and come back?"

"We believe the universe is spherical," said Chiram coolly. "In a fourth-dimensional sense, of course. We will remain under constant acceleration and our speed will increase constantly. If the universe is spherical we will return; if it is infinite, we will fly on forever."

TWO SHIPS landed, a slender cylinder and a peculiar impractical-looking hull the shape of a doughnut. Chiram stepped out of the cylinder, marched up the concrete ramp to the glass-walled office.

Jay Banners, who was putting up the money, and a lank young man were waiting for him. Banners resembled Chiram in outward proportion, but his hair was sparse, the lines of his face were softer. He looked easy, amiable; there was nothing of the spartan or the ascetic in Jay Banners.

Chiram was associated with the discovery of striatics, the gravitron and the subsequent inertia-negative destiation fields; he had been a member of the original Centauri expedition. Banners had never been into space, but he held majority stock in Star Island Development, and he was director of half a dozen other corporations.

He waved a pudgy hand at Chiram. "Herb, meet my son, Jay Junior." And now I'll give you a surprise. Hold your

hat. Jay wants to go along on the trip. So I told him we'd see what we could do." He glanced at Chiram expectantly.

Chiram pulled up the corners of his mouth, squinted as if he were eating an unexpectedly sour pickle. "Well, now, Banners . . . I don't know if it's advisable . . . Inexperienced member," he muttered. "Got a crew pretty well lined out. . . ."

"Oh come now," said Banners bluffly. "It isn't as if Jay was a rank amateur. He's just out of engineering school; he knows space inside out; studied astro-gation and all that stuff, hey, Jay?"

"That's right," said Jay languidly.

Chiram turned chilly eyes up and down Jay Banners Jr.—a loose-limbed young man with oily black hair worn over-long for Chiram's taste. He said, "It's a pretty tough grind, young fellow. Strict discipline. We're cooped up in a little cabin with no amusements, a very serious proposition. And about one chance in ten of getting back. . . . An old man like me can afford to throw his life away. A lad like you has that all before him."

Jay carelessly shrugged, and the older Banners said. "I've told him all this, Herb, and he insists that he wants to go. And then I figured that maybe it would be a good thing to have a Banners aboard. Make it the Chiram-Banners Expedition for a fact, eh, Herb?"

Chiram drummed his fingers savagely on the desk, at a loss for words.

Jay said, "We've learned a lot of new methods at school. Might help you out once in a while if you get stumped."

Chiram became red in the face, turned away.

"Now, Jay," said Banners, "take it easy on an old man. I know you're up to snuff on all the latest ideas, but don't forget that men like Herb Chiram pioneered the whole business."

Jay shrugged, moodily puffed a cigarette.

"It's settled, then," said Banners jovially. "And look here, Herb, don't hold back on him on my account. Treat him like a hired hand. He's tough—just like his old man. He can stand it. If he gets out of line, give it to him good."

Chiram walked to a window, stood looking out.

Banners said, "We saw you bringing down the ships. How did the test turn out?"

"Very well," said Chiram. "From Earth to Pluto we deviated nineteen inches off the true line. That's on the order of ten to the minus eighth or ninth part of a second. Maybe closer. I haven't figured it out yet. It's close enough."

Jay flicked ashes to the floor with his little finger. "Probably be best to install gyro-compasses just to be on the safe side."

Chiram said in a keen, cold voice, "Gyro-compasses are grossly inaccurate

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

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compared to the sleeve and piston principle."

"Explain to Jay how it works," said Banners. "I never could quite get the hang of it. I know that Nip and Tuck alternate the lead—"

Chiram spoke in a heavy impatient voice. "An object in free flight moves in a true course, when it's insulated from gravity—as inside a destriation shell. Our problem was to combine free-flight accuracy with acceleration. We decided to use two ships, alternately accelerating and flying free—the ship in free flight correcting the course of the ship under acceleration.

"Assume one component flying free—say Nip, the cylinder. Tuck, the tube, is ten thousand miles astern. Tuck accelerates; the application of power may or may not cause a slight deviation. As soon as the destriation shells meet, radar beams make contact and any slight deviation in course is corrected. Tuck slides over Nip, the power is shut off, it flies free on ahead. When it has taken a ten-thousand-mile lead, Nip accelerates, plunges through the hole in Tuck. The process is automatic, very rapid, very accurate."

Banners said seriously, "Doesn't that constant start and stop jar you, Herb?"

Jay looped a leg over the desk. "Nope. Don't forget, pop, we've integrated inertia completely with the ship since your day. Don't feel a thing any more, except the normal built-in gravity."

Banners laughed indulgently, clapped Chiram's stiff shoulder. "Don't say I didn't warn you, Herb. This lad here is pretty far ahead of us old-timers. . . . That's how it goes, out with the old, in with the new."

Jay blew a complacent gust of smoke across the room. Chiram stared at him for several seconds, took two short paces up the room, two back.

"Banners," he said crisply, "everything considered, I don't think it wise for your son to make the trip."

Jay raised his eyebrows; his mouth sagged. Banners stared; then his face relaxed. "Now Herb, I know it's dangerous, I know you don't like the responsibility. But Jay's got his mind made up. Some girl's been after him, I expect. And I'd like to see the lad make the trip. In fact, I've been thinking I might even go myself. . . ."

Chiram said hastily, "Very well, very well. . . . I warn you, young fellow, it's a tough grind. It's snap to orders and no back-talk. If that's understood—I guess I have nothing further to say."

"You'll get along, you'll get along," exclaimed Banners. "With your experience, Herb, and your training, Jay—I can't see how the trip won't be a great success. Think of it, Herb! The Chiram-Banners Expedition—Commander, Herb Chiram; Navigator, Jay Banners Junior! Doesn't that sound good, now?"

"It makes my head swim," said Chiram.

Jay dropped his cigarette butt to the floor, said thoughtfully, "You know, that Nip and Tuck idea may be sound—but I'd trust more to a good gyroscope. . . . At least we ought to ship a couple for the corroboratic index."

Chiram frowned. "'Corroboratic index'? What's that?" he asked contemptuously.

Jay said, "A rather new concept. One of these days I'll explain it to you. In rough terms, it's the average area of the integral under a series of probability curves, each given the proper weighting."

Banners nodded heavily. "Young fellow's got a sound head on him, Herb. Maybe we'd better install a couple gyroscopes. No harm playing safe."

Chiram bowed slightly to Jay. "The gyroscopes are in your charge. See that they do not exceed two cubic feet in volume."

Jay nodded. "Fine. I can cut it smaller than that. Machinery has become more

precise since your time, Mr. Chiram." He rubbed his upper lip. "In fact—if you like—I'll take the navigation clean off your hands. I'm pretty good at it, made an A in navigation all during school."

Chiram snorted. "You'll do no such thing, young fellow. And you'll understand right now, before the day's a minute older, you'll do what you're told, you'll obey orders, and you'll keep your school-book ideas to yourself unless they're asked for!"

Jay stared in astonishment; he turned and looked at his father, who wagged his head solemnly. "That's the way it goes, Jay. Old Herb here is a tough one. You've picked a tartar when you try to put it over Herb. What he says, goes; remember it."

CHIRAM, Jay Banners Jr., a taciturn technician named Bob Galt, and Julius Johnson, the cook, a taffy-colored smiling man with a flat face and flat head, made up the crew of Nip the cylinder. Two old-time spacemen, Art Henry and Joe Lavindar, were stationed aboard Tuck the tube.

The takeoff was recorded by cameras, television, and witnessed by a crowd of four million. The two ships rose separately and left for a rendezvous a million miles past the Moon. Here they would join, orient themselves, and set out toward Deneb in Cygnus, slightly up from the prime plane of the Milky Way.

Chiram called his crew together in the small saloon below the bridge deck, which would serve as mess hall and recreation room. Bob Galt sat at one end of the bench, a stooped, small-boned man, completely self-possessed and self-sufficient, with a face like an angry parrot's. Beside him sat Julius, the cook, his wide mouth curved in a perpetual grin. Jay slouched back at the end of the bench with legs crossed, eyes half-closed.

Chiram faced them, stocky, erect, his ruff of iron-gray hair freshly trimmed.

"Now, men, as you know, we have a stiff grind ahead of us. If we return, we're heroes. The chances are we'll never get back. If space is infinite we'll fly forever. If our course deviates from a straight line, we're just as bad off. Then of course you've all read the fantastic speculations on the possibility of attack by alien space-vessels or creatures inhabiting space. I do not need to label this as nonsense.

"Our greatest danger is ourselves. Boredom, petty irritations—these are our worst enemies. We're crowded together, tangled in each other's arms and legs. I can think of no situation so calculated to bring out the best or worst in a man. Now you, Bob, and you, Julius, I've shipped with you many a time, I know you well. You, Jay, you represent your father, and I'm sure that, like the rest of us, you're determined to make the trip as easy on all our nerves as possible.

"There's not much work to do. I wish there were more. Julius, of course, is in charge of cooking and the galley." His voice took on a sardonic edge. "Jay has his gyroscopes to attend to, and I understand he's keeping a detailed record. . . . Well, every man to his own poison.

"I'll take the first watch, Jay the second, Bob the third. Our main duties will be to lubricate the machinery, to chart what we can see in the vision panels, and keep the destiation field at normal percentage. Each of us will be responsible for the cleanliness of himself, his clothes, his bunk. Everyone must be neat. Nothing is as demoralizing as slovenliness. Shaving and clean clothes are mandatory. . . . That's all for now."

He turned, swung himself up on the bridge deck.

THE MOON was a tremendous silver melon spattered with black frost; it hulked below and off to the left. Directly ahead floated Tuck, the

tube, with a cluster of stars shining through the hole.

Chiram nosed the cylinder into the opening, thrust home a switch; the cylinder shivered, jerked as the guide beams excited relays, pulled the ships into rigid alignment.

Dead ahead was Deneb—the line of their way around the universe.

Chiram called by radio to Tuck. "Everything all right in there?"

"Ready to go," came back Henry's voice.

Chiram said, "Throw in your field." He yanked another switch; the gravity unit buzzed, rattled, settled into a drone; the crew was tied to the ship, and, like the ship, free of inertia.

Chiram spun a polished wheel, and the voyage had begun.

An instant passed. Then a flicker at the side port was Tuck, racing ahead. Another flicker was Nip threading Tuck. The flickers became swifter, became a continuous quiver, vanished.

Stars began to move, slide past each other, like shining motes in a drift of sunlit air. They streamed past—now bunched, now sparse, clusters, swarms, flaring clouds of gas, and as they passed aft of amidships, they vanished, their light lagging behind the thistledown rush of Nip and Tuck.

Flame, dazzle, flicker—stars in pairs, trios, quartets, stars in hurrying multitudinous companies. Stars in rivers and stars like isolated beacons. Stars approached from far ahead, passing over, around, under, like wind-blown sparks. And presently the stars vanished in front and to the side and Nip and Tuck were in intergalactic space.

Speed added to speed, built up in constant increments. Ship threaded ship like a needle in a shuttle, each guiding the other down a geometrically straight line. So straight that in a thousand light years the error might be a hundred miles—an

error which might or might not average out over longer distances.

Jay checked the course on his gyrocompass. He looked a minute, tapped the case with his finger. "Right on," he announced. "We're right on course."

"Glad to hear it," said Chiram sardonically. "Watch it close now."

The great nebula in Andromeda passed under them, a whirling pancake of cold fire. It passed behind, out of sight.

Speed, speed, speed. Acceleration as fast as the relays could shuttle ship back and forth through ship. Speed building up toward instantaneity.

Watches passed, days passed. The galaxies flitted by like luminous bats—straggling watch-springs, hot puddles of gas. At the start and close of every watch Jay checked his gyroscope, then spent two or three hours writing in his journal—minutiae of the voyage, vignettes of personal philosophy, observations on the personalities of his shipmates.

Julius and Bob played cards and chess; occasionally Chiram joined them. Jay played a few games of chess—long enough to find that Julius could beat him as often as he set his mind to it—then gave up. Julius grinned his grin, spoke little; Bob wore his angry parrot's face, spoke not at all. Chiram kept himself aloof, watched every detail of the voyage with a careful humorless eye, gave what orders were necessary in a carefully modulated voice. And Jay, after a few futile attempts to argue navigational techniques with Chiram, became as taciturn as the others.

The galaxies slid backward. After every watch Jay peered intently at his gyroscope. One day he called Chiram over.

"We're off course. Look—there's no doubt about it. A whole degree. I've been watching it for several days."

Chiram looked down a moment, shook his head, half-turned away. "You've got a precession somewhere."

Jay sniffed. "More likely that those

spacer beams between the hulls are out of focus."

Chiram glanced down his nose at the gyroscopes, said stonily, "Hardly possible. They're automatically compensated, double-checked. Two separate sets of spacers are involved, don't forget—one correcting on a basis of wave interference, the other by correlation of angle and beam strength. They're perfectly synchronized; if they weren't the alarm would go off. . . . Your gyro is out somewhere."

Grumbling, Jay turned to look at the dial. "One degree," he mumbled: "That's a million light years—a hundred million light years—" But Chiram had walked away.

Jay seated himself beside the gyro, watched the face like a cat at a tank of goldfish. If it told the truth, they were irretrievably lost. He dropped to his hands and knees, checked every part of the gyro as well as he could; it seemed in perfect order.

Jay slouched to the table, where Bob and Julius played chess, stood looking down with hands clasped behind his back. They took no heed of his presence.

"Well," said Jay, looking across the room toward the gyro, "we're goners. We're done for."

"Yeah? How's that?" asked Julius, moving a pawn.

"The gyro doesn't lie," said Jay. "We're a degree off course, according to the gyro."

Bob Galt darted an unemotional glance up at Jay, returned to the board.

"I told the old man," Jay said bitterly. "I told him before we took off that his rig was too damn complicated to work."

"We all got to die sometime, kid," said Julius. "It might as well be out here. . . . I'm not worryin'. We're eatin' good; I got old Galt here on the run. . . ." The grin widened.

Bob sneered. "The hell you say." He

moved a knight to threaten the pawn. "Try that on."

Julius bent his heavy head over the board. "Relax, kid, watch the scenery. . . ."

Jay hesitated, then turned away, crossed the room, flung himself on his bunk, moving his lips in silent curses. He lay quiet twenty minutes, staring up at the hull. A degree off course. . . .

He rose on his elbow, watched the galaxies flitting past in the vision panels. Stars—millions, billions of stars, curdled into luminous whorls. These out here were nameless, unknown to the astronomers on that far atom, Earth. . . . He considered Earth, so far distant as to be unknowable. How could they ever again locate that precious fleck? Presumably if they returned to the home galaxy Earth could be found. But now—a degree off course! And no one aboard cared a fig either way. . . . Well, by God, thought Jay furiously, these dull animals might not care a nickel for their lives, but he was Jay Banners Junior and he had his whole life to live! . . . Now then, if he returned the ship to its course, there would still be a chance of hitting the galaxy on the way back. They would thank him for it, Chiram and Bob Galt and Julius, when he finally told them; there would be jocular comment, chaffing—and of course that bull-headed Chiram would walk around with his neck stiff. Nevertheless he'd have Jay to thank for bringing them home; he'd have to back down, admit himself wrong. . . . And if the story happened to leak out—Jay's vision soared. Newspapers, television, cheers from crowded streets. . . .

Jay rose to his feet. Chiram lay in his bunk asleep, his feet in white socks neatly placed one on the other.

Jay glanced across the cabin. It was nominally Galt's watch; he sat absorbed in his game, with one hand crooked over his queen. Julius, his brow furrowed, was

wiping at his mouth with a big yellow hand.

Jay sauntered across the room, climbed the three steps to the bridge deck, nonchalantly leaned across the chart table, watching the view on the forward screen. Black space, the galaxies like luminous jellyfish in a midnight ocean. They floated in from far ahead, drifted effortlessly past, the near ones sliding over the far ones in an implausible shift of perspective.

The sight was soothing, hypnotic, dreamlike in its silent majesty. . . . Behind him Julius laughed. Jay blinked, straightened, came back to himself. He looked cautiously toward the controls, in a railed box to his right. Only Chiram was supposed to enter the box. He peered out the side vision panel. Tuck, the partner ship, was naturally invisible, flitting back and forth across Nip in the constant acceleration. Jay glanced at the computer dial for their speed: already 6,200 l.y.p.s. and steadily mounting. He turned his attention back to the controls. There it was—a bright knurled knob. A mere touch, and the spacer beams would weaken infinitesimally on one side, to twist the axis on which the two ships rode.

He took a casual step toward the control box, darted out his arm, touched the knob. . . . A great blow fell on his shoulder. He reeled back, sank to the deck. He became aware of three pairs of legs, heard a harsh unsympathetic voice: "I've been waiting for a trick like this ever since he showed me that fool machine of his."

"He's just an addled kid," came Julius' voice, light, careless.

Bob Galt's feet moved abruptly, turned half away.

Chiram said in the same harsh voice, "Pick him up, take him to his bunk, chain his ankle to the stanchion. . . . Julius, you throw a plaster on the bullet-hole. Can't trust a lunatic like that at large."

JAY HAD nothing to complain of. Julius was careful with his wound; his big taffy-colored hands moved quickly, gently; his grin never vanished.

He was fed from a tray, and released to use the latrine. These were the only attentions he received. What sluggish life there was in the ship flowed on and past him. His presence was ignored, no one spoke, he spoke to no one.

From his bunk he could see the length of the ship and all that happened aboard: Julius and Bob Galt at their interminable chess, Julius facing him, rubbing his big flat face with a hand when puzzled or preoccupied, Galt sitting crouched over the board with only the hard angles of his profile showing. Chiram played no more cards or chess; his sole diversion was a slow pacing up and down the cabin with half an hour's work at an exerciser morning and night.

The picture became utterly familiar to Jay. It was changeless, uniform. The same colors, the same pattern of shadows, the same pragmatic thud to Chiram's tread, the same grin on Julius' face, the same slope to Galt's shoulders.

The ship had plunged into darkness. There were no more galaxies, no more nebulae. "We've evidently passed the outer fringe of the exploding universe," Jay heard Chiram say ruefully. Jay asked himself, what will it be now? Infinity? He had understood that the exploding universe was like a balloon being inflated, time and space and all—not just the blast of a trillion stars into nothingness. . . .

Was space infinite? Were they flitting like dreams into blackness? To go on and on and on—and then on some more.

The ports showed dead black outside, without spark or flash. They were still accelerating. What was it now? 8,000, 10,000 l.y.p.s.?

Jay turned his back to the cabin, wrote in his journal. He wrote copiously—pages of introspection, fragments of quick-scrib-

bled poetry, which he often returned to, copied, revised. He kept statistical charts: the detailed study of Chiram's pacing, his average number of steps per square foot of deck, the pattern behind Julius' menus. He carefully noted his dreams and spent hours trying to trace their genesis from his past. He wrote careful and elaborate exhortations of Chiram—"for the record" he told himself—and equally cogent self-justifications. He made interminable lists—places he had visited, girl-friends, books, colors, songs. He sketched Chiram, Julius, Bob Galt time and time again.

Hours, days, weeks. Conversation dwindled, died. Julius and Bob played chess, and when Bob was at his watch duties, Julius played solitaire—unhurriedly, carefully, glancing at each card as if it might be a surprise.

Chess—pacing—food—sleep—the trips to the latrine, with Julius marching placidly at his back. And occasionally Jay considered an attempt to overpower Julius, kill all on the ship. But Julius was stocky and tough. And what good would result, in any event?

Darkness outside the port. . . . Were they actually moving? Or was motion a peculiarity of the home space, where there were objects to measure it? Was infinity merely a soft dark trap where no effort could produce meaningful progress? Eternal darkness outside the port. Suppose one were on foot, walking out there. . . .

Jay put down his journal, stared. His eyes bulged. A sound scraped up his throat. Chiram paused in his pacing, turned his head. Jay pointed a long trembling arm toward the port.

"It was a face! I saw it looking in the port!"

Chiram turned startled eyes to the vision panel. Galt, asleep, grumbled, grunted. Julius, playing solitaire, shuffled the cards with imperturbable movements of smooth yellow arms. Chiram looked skeptically back at Jay.

Jay cried, "I saw it plain as day, I tell you! I'm not crazy! It was a whitish figure, and it came flitting up and then the face looked in through the port. . . ."

Julius stopped shuffling, Galt was leaning out of his bunk. Chiram strode across the floor, peered out briefly. He turned back to Jay, said in a brusque voice, "You've had a bad dream."

Jay laid his head on his arm, blinked at tears. So far, far from home. . . . Ghosts peering in from space. . . . Was this where souls came when they died? Out here to wander the void, so completely forlorn and lonesome. . . .

"I saw it," he said. "I saw it, I tell you. I saw it."

"Relax, kid, relax," said Julius. "You'll give us all the willies."

Jay lay on his side, staring at the port. He gave a great gasp. "I saw it again! It's a face, I tell you!" He rose up from his bunk, his lank black hair, very long now, dangling past his forehead. His mouth wobbled, glistened wetly.

Chiram went to the medicine chest, loaded a hypospray. He motioned; Galt and Julius held Jay's arms and legs; Chiram pressed the trigger, and the opiate seeped through Jay's pale skin, into his blood, into his brain. . . .

WHEN he awoke, Galt and Julius were playing chess, and Chiram was asleep. He looked fearfully to the port. Darkness. Blackness. Lightlessness.

He sighed, moaned. Julius flashed him a glance, returned to the chess-board. Jay sighed, reached for his journal.

Weeks, months. Fantastic speed toward—what? One day Jay called Chiram from his pacing.

"Well?" asked Chiram crisply.

"If you'll let me loose," muttered Jay, "I'd like to take up my duties again."

Chiram said in a carefully passionless voice, "I'm sorry that you've had to be

confined. It was necessary, not for punishment, but for the safety of the expedition. Because you are irresponsible. Because I can't trust you."

Jay said, "I promise you that I'll act well—responsibly. I've learned my lesson. . . . Suppose we go on forever like this? Into nothing? Do you intend to keep me chained the rest of my life?"

Chiram stared at him thoughtfully, trying to fathom the ultimate justice of the situation.

Galt called down from the bridge deck, "Hey, Cap! There's a glow ahead! *Light!*"

Three bounds took Chiram to the port. Jay rose on his elbow, craned his neck.

Far ahead hung a ball of glowing fog.

Chiram said in a hushed voice, "That's what a universe of billions of galaxies would look like—from a great distance."

"Have we made it around, Cap?" Galt asked, his voice sharp.

Chiram said slowly, "I don't know, Bob. . . . We've come so far—so much farther than anyone had predicted. . . . It might be our universe, or it might be another. I'm as much in the dark as you are."

"If it is our universe, Cap, what are the chances of hitting home?"

There was a pause. Chiram said, "Darned if I know, Bob. I'm hoping."

"Think we better slow down? We're hitting an awful clip."

"Twenty-two thousand light years a second. We can slow down a lot faster than we pick up, just by slacking off the field."

There was silence. Then Galt said, "She's expanding mighty fast. . . ."

Chiram said in an even voice, "It's no universe. It's a cloud of gas. I'm going to get a spectral reading on it."

The glowing fog grew large, flooded under the ship, was gone. Ahead was blackness. Chiram came down from the bridge-deck, took up his pacing, head bent.

He looked up and his eyes met Jay's. Jay was still propped up on his arms, still looking out ahead into the void.

Chiram said, "Very well. I'll take a chance on you."

Jay slowly sank back on the bunk, lay lax and loose. Chiram said, "These are your orders. You are forbidden to set foot on the bridge deck. Next time I'll shoot to kill."

Jay nodded wordlessly. His eyes glistened under the long lank hair. Chiram pulled a key from his pocket, unlocked the shackles, and without a word resumed his pacing.

For five minutes Jay lay unmoving on his bunk. Julius said from the galley, "Come and get it."

Jay saw he had set four places at the table.

JAY WASHED, shaved. Freedom was a luxury. This was living again—if it were nothing but eat, sleep, look out into darkness. This was life: it would be like this the rest of his life. . . . Curious existence. It seemed natural, sensible. Earth was a trifling recollection, a scene remembered from childhood.

The gyroscopes. . . . Yes, what would they tell him now? They had been far from his mind; perhaps he had banned them from his consciousness as being a symbol of his disgrace. . . . Still, what did they say?

He went to the corner of the workbench where they lay, raised the dust-lid. He stared for a minute.

"Well, kid, how's it look?" Julius asked him lightly. "Are we on course?"

Jay slowly replaced the lid. He said, "The last time I looked we were one degree off to the right. Now we're eighty-five degrees off—to the left!"

Julius shook his head in genial perplexity, grinning. "Looks mighty bad from here."

Jay chewed at his lip. "Something

damn strange is working around the ship. . . ."

Galt yelled loudly, "Hey, Cap! There's more light ahead—and this time it's stars for sure!"

They came on the universe like a ship raising an island from the sea—first a blur without detail, then larger, clearer, and finally the great masses dwarfed the ship. Galaxies pelted at them, flats of wild light rushing past.

Chiram stood like a man of marble on the bridge deck, one hand on the control of the destriation field. Galt stood beside him, head hunched down into his shoulders.

They passed flat over a great whirlpool galaxy and the individual stars glinted and glanced and told of wonderful bright planets.

Galt said, "That sort of looks like her, Cap."

Chiram shook his head. "Not large enough. Don't forget we've got a markedly large galaxy—several times average size. That's what I'm watching for. Of course," and his voice blurred, "this may not even be our home universe. It might be a different set of galaxies entirely.

There's no way of knowing. . . . If we run directly into an exceptionally large galaxy, with approximately the right configuration—we'll turn off the power."

"Look," said Bob, "there's a big one out there, see it? That looks about like ours too." His voice rose. "That's it, Cap!"

Chiram said irresolutely, "Well, Bob, I don't know. She's a long way to the side. . . . Of course we've come a long way, but if we once turn off our course, and we've made a mistake—then we're goners for sure."

"We're goners if we drive past," said Galt.

Chiram wavered in a hell of indecision. Jay saw his mouth twitch. He reached, took a firm grip on the field control.

Jay said suddenly, "That's not it, this isn't even the right universe."

Galt turned an angry red face down. "Shut up!"

Chiram paid no heed. His hand tightened on the field cut-off.

Jay said, "Captain, I can prove it. Listen!"

Chiram turned his head. "How can you prove it?"

THE ELIXIR OF HATE

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"By the gyroscope." He spoke hurriedly, over Galt's contemptuous snort, trying to wash down Chiram's wall of hostility with words.

"The gyroscope holds a steady axis. It points in a constant direction. When we were a few weeks out I saw a degree of deflection. I misinterpreted the reading. I thought it indicated an error in course. I was wrong; it was showing how far around we had traveled. One three hundred and sixtieth. I just looked at it again. It read eighty-five degrees to the other side—or two eighty-five degrees around. In other words we've come more than three-quarters of the way. And when the gyro is back at zero again, we'll know we're home."

Chiram narrowed his eyes, surveyed Jay—looked at him, through him, beyond. Galt's angry mouth pushed out doubtfully, his color faded. He glanced to the big galaxy, now passing close by amidships.

Chiram asked, "What does the gyro read now?"

Jay ran, raised the dust lid. "Two eighty-six."

Chiram said, "We'll go on. Dead ahead."

"Dead ahead," said Galt.

Chiram smiled grimly. "I hope not."

THEY passed the universe, and off into a new ocean of blackness. It was the old routine—except now there was a restless watchfulness aboard. Chiram watched the gyro as carefully as Jay; steadily the lubber-line ticked around, day after day after day. 290—300—310—320.

Galt spent his time on the bridge deck, watching ahead, hardly coming down to eat. No more chess—Julius played solitaire, slowly, with careful attention to each card.

330, and Chiram joined Galt's restless watch.

340. "We should be getting close,"

said Galt, staring into the bottomless blackness.

Chiram said, "We'll be there when we get there."

350. Galt bent forward, hands pressed to the chart table, head on a level with his elbows.

"It's light! Light!"

Chiram came to stare at the pale glow dead ahead.

"There it is." He cut off the acceleration; they plunged free at constant speed. For the first time since the start of the voyage the partner-ship Tuck appeared; they had almost forgotten its existence.

At 355, galaxies swept past like the first suburbs of a city.

At 357, they felt as if they were riding down familiar streets.

358. They looked here and there expectantly. There was quick movement of feet on the deck, the restless movement of heads. Chiram kept saying, "Too soon, too soon. . . . There's a long ways to go yet. . . ."

359. Chiram had tacitly relaxed his orders to Jay, and all four stood on the bridge deck together pointing, looking, muttering.

360. "There! That big one! Golly, it looks almost like the face of someone you know!"

Dead ahead lay the great wheeling galaxy. It grew huge, its arms of glowing stars spread open to embrace the ship. Chiram relaxed the field. The striations of space gripped at their atoms, the ship slowed like a bullet shot into water.

They coasted into the outer lanes of stars, across the far-flung tendrils, past the globular clusters, across the central knot.

Ahead, like magic, the sky suddenly showed full of familiar patterns.

"Dead ahead!" cried Chiram. "See—that's the constellation Cygnus; that's where we started for. . . . And there—dead ahead—that yellow star. . . ."

Maybe, Sam thought, his
air would make them
not-alive. . . .



THE FIRST

By KRIS NEVILLE

Where's Sam? Lost—hidden in the deep alien forest where none can follow, searching with a hollow heart—hating us. For we gave Sam man's most priceless heritage—Eden . . . alone!

SAM WAS running; he had always wanted to run, not like on the treadmill in his room that went around and around without going anywhere, but really run, and not be stopped by walls or barriers, either.

A barrier was a thing that didn't look like a wall, a thing you could see through,

but a thing that, if you explored with your hands, if you felt, was just like a wall. There was—had been—a big barrier in his room. One whole side of his room had been a barrier. He had picked up the heavy table and thrown it against the barrier. He had thrown it hard, really hard, because the barrier was very strong. But he was strong, too, stronger than the barrier, and he had broken it.

For his first dozen awkward strides he had thought he might run into another barrier; so he had pulled the table after him, but when he didn't run into one, he dropped the table and ran faster and faster, his heart growing in his body as he felt the air hitting on his face.

He ran fast, fast as he knew he would be able to run if he ever tried, faster than they thought he could run. He was able to run faster than they thought, and he was stronger than they thought, and he had kept that to himself, so they never thought he could break the barrier.

There was a small rise of ground between him and the Dome now, and he felt better. He was free and they would never find him, and that made him feel good.

Of that he was sure, they would never find him, because he wouldn't let them find him. If he saw one of them coming after him, he would run and run—

Or—

He smiled to himself. He was stronger than they thought he was, because they never thought he could break the barrier, and if he saw one of them coming toward him, one of them inside of a black, shiny thing, he would—he would—

He didn't want to think. Not now. He wanted to run.

There was a dark patch ahead of him, the big dark patch. He knew that he could go into it like he had seen things that moved do.

(Some things moved, and they were the things that were alive like he was alive, and the things that didn't move, they

were the things that were not-alive.) He had seen alive things, big, pretty alive things, move in and out of the woods, so he knew that he could go in, and he knew that it would hide him.

Often he had looked out from behind his barrier and felt it call to him, that dark patch, call to him in a silent voice that made his blood tingle, call to him, say, "You belong here," say, "This is your home, your place is here, away from them."

He used his hands to help him run, and it made him run faster.

Squat, insect-like he was, scuttling toward the dark woods.

The underbrush was thick; it tore at him. But it felt good, even, to have something tear at him, because it meant that he was free of the Dome.

Deeper and deeper into the woods. Until the tall, gnarled trees were all around him, and the soft darkness they made was all around him.

Sam rested.

He drew up his body into a big, fuzzy ball and rested; the ground was warm to him and the woods was friendly to him and he was tired, oh, so very tired, because he had run and run.

Sam slept.

WHEN he awoke, it was dark—not dim, but dark. There were not even any of the long-tailed things there in the sky. For a moment he was afraid and he was not sure where he was; then, slowly, he knew, and he was not afraid any more. And if he waited, it would get lighter. (It always got light after it got dark, if he just waited long enough.)

He huddled there, waiting for the huge, faintly bluish sun to rise, to give him light, so that he might see the new world around him.

By and by he heard strange sounds in the trees, and he knew that something

alive, like he was alive, was up there making the sounds. He wanted to be able to see them, but it was still too dark. (Although, far to his left, above the tops of the trees, he could see the jet of the sky begin to color, oh, ever so slightly, and he knew if he waited just a little more he would be able to see the things up there that were alive like he was alive.)

He thought of the Dome while he squatted, waiting. And he thought of the ugly things inside the Dome.

They would stand there in the Dome, stand there before a little barrier and look into his room, and they would look in on him, stand and stare and watch him. They were always watching him.

They were tall and pale—with only two arms and only two legs and only two eyes—and ugly, oh, so very ugly. And they looked all soft and squeezey. If he had one of them in his arms, he could mash it. Into a little pulp.

But when they got inside the black, shiny things, they weren't soft any more. They were hard, hard and cold. And he couldn't mash one of them then.

Sam had tried.

Not hard, not so hard they could see how strong he was, but hard enough to see that he couldn't mash one of them when it was inside a black, shiny thing, and when he touched them, they always touched cold and hard.

Ever since he could know, they touched cold and hard.

Sometimes he wanted to touch one of them when it wasn't inside a black, shiny thing, and it hurt him bad, deep, to think of that—wanting to touch one of them very softly (oh, so very softly), and feel one of them touch him and pet him, with its ugly hands, and maybe hold him until he went to sleep. But they always put on their black, shiny things when they came to see him, came into his room to see him, and they touched cold, not at all like he wanted to be touched.

But lately, it didn't hurt him so deep. Anyhow, not so much, lately.

They were too ugly, he told himself, not pretty like him, but ugly, and he didn't want anything as ugly as that to touch him, he told himself.

He didn't like them, he told himself. He never did like them, and that was why he had run away and away, because he didn't like them.

It was light, and he could see little things above him, moving. They were very pretty, and he wanted to hold one of them in his hands.

But just to see them made Sam know that he was different from them in a way that he was not different from the ugly ones, and it was very puzzling. He wasn't like the little, moving, alive things that he wanted to hold in his hands but couldn't because he did not know how to get up to them, up there in the tree-tops above him.

It made him sad.

He looked around, in the first dim light.

If he were back in the Dome, they would be bringing in the good-tasting things again; he looked around some more.

And he saw some of the good-tasting things, hanging ripely red on a bush, there, ripely red and shining.

They tasted even better than they ever had, and he ate all he wanted, more than they had ever given him.

HE MOVED on, deeper into the woods, and as he moved, he heard sounds all around him of things moving like he was moving, of things alive like he was alive.

One time he saw a big bulk of a thing, up ahead, through the dense trees, and he gave a little, sharp shout and ran after it, but it heard him, and it ran away, knocking down the littler of the trees, and he couldn't catch it because it ran so fast.

That made Sam feel very bad, very bad indeed, and he sat down and felt very bad for a long time.

Then he got up.

This time he wouldn't let one of them get away; he wouldn't make a cry so it could hear him; he would be very quiet until he got near enough to reach out and touch it, and then hold it, to keep it from running away.

Finally he saw another one of the alive things, not as big as the first one and lots more furry.

He crept up on it very slowly.

He saw, when he was near enough, that it was bending over and eating at something that looked like it might have been alive, once, like he was alive, but that wasn't alive any more.

Sam was very close now, behind a little tree, watching it eat, hearing it eat, seeing long teeth rip into the thing on the ground.

Sam stepped out.

The thing that was eating stopped eating and threw back its head and opened its mouth, and the green stuff dripped from its jaws.

It made a very loud sound.

Sam was very happy. Sam made a loud sound, too.

Sam moved in, and it backed away, still making sounds.

Sam wanted bad to touch it.

He got ready, tensing his muscles, and sprang.

Sam caught it around the neck, and Sam held on to it. It thrashed about, but Sam was very strong, and he didn't let it get away.

It tried to put its long teeth into one of his arms, but Sam wouldn't let it because he was afraid it might hurt him, worse than the brush had scratched him, worse than that.

For a long time Sam held it while it fought and snarled, and he ran his fingers through its fur, and that felt good to him.

Sam made noises of pleasure, and petted it, and liked to feel it warm in his arms against him. It was furry like he was furry. But he knew that he was more like the ugly ones than he was like the furry things.

So Sam let it go, and it ran away, and Sam felt very sad again, and very puzzled, too.

Sam sat down on the ground and looked at the thing that lay on the ground, not moving, half eaten up.

Sam squirmed over, alongside of it, and petted it, but it wasn't any fun because it was still and cold.

Sam finally took his strong hands and tore out some of the greenish meat.

Sam tasted it, and it was good, better even than the round, red things.

He ate until he couldn't eat any more, and then he coiled up against what was left of the body that had fed him and slept for a long time, happy.

SAM WAS hungry again. He had moved on into the woods, and he was hungry again.

He knew he was hungry when he saw one of the furry things like he had eaten of, ahead of him, eating off of the low-hanging leaves.

Sam knew that if he walked up to it, it would run; knew that if he wanted it to lie down so he could eat of it, he would have to make it lie down, or it would run away.

Sam was afraid he couldn't get close enough because there was an open space, a wide open space between them, and if he tried to cross it, it would see him and run away.

Sam wrinkled his brow.

Then Sam picked up a hard thing that lay on the ground, a big, hard thing, that was heavy.

Sam knew he could hit the alive thing before him with it, and when he did, he would knock it down, like he had knocked

one of the ugly ones down, in his room there, against the Dome, when it had brought him his good-tasting things.

Sam threw the rock.

Sam heard it hit, and Sam was right behind it. He pounced on the alive thing that lay kicking, rushed and fell on it, and it squealed and squealed and Sam knew that it was afraid.

Sam dug his hands into it, and it squealed some more.

After a time, it stopped squealing, and Sam ate, ate of the warm meat.

When he finished eating, he thought about what had happened, and he decided that alive things don't like to be made not-alive things. And he thought he ought to remember that: for if he didn't like something, he might want to do something to the thing he didn't like that it wouldn't like to have done to it.

SAM SQUATTED on the hill and looked down on the Dome. It was a very tall and very steep hill, and the Dome lay down at the bottom of it, and Sam looked down on the Dome.

He crouched very low, so they wouldn't see him. He could see some of them in the black, shiny things on the outside of the Dome.

But he knew they weren't waiting for a long-tailed thing.

A long-tailed thing was very big and very pretty, and it made a loud sound like

thunder-rumble. Only it just came once in a great while, and it stopped on the big, level place there. The black, shiny things would take stuff out of it and put stuff into it, and then, after a while, it would give a big sound, and its tail would lick out and out—the most pretty tail—and it would jump up into the air, and go up and up until it was just a little speck, just like one of those other specks up there. Sam thought maybe that's what stars were, long-tailed things, far, far away.

But they weren't waiting for a long-tailed thing today. They were still looking for Sam, and if they found him, they would bring him back, and then they would put him in the room again, on the outside of the Dome, there, where they could watch him.

There had never been anything but the room. Ever since he could know, he had always lived in the room. At first he was very little—so little that he could hardly know at all; and even before that, he thought; as if he had started to be alive there.

And they always watched him. (And when he didn't feel good, they would do things to make him feel better.) It was very strange, somehow: why they wanted to do all the things they did: as if they were all there just because he was, and for no other reason, and the only thing they wanted to do was watch him.

Sam didn't like that, not at all, because



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they were ugly, and they would never pet him and hold him like he wanted to be petted and held.

Sam was very still, watching.

He didn't like them. He wanted to do something to hurt them, because he didn't like them; do something like he did to things he wanted to eat of, make them not-alive, because things that are alive don't want to be made not-alive; he wanted to make the soft, ugly things not-alive. Because they never petted him, never once petted him as long as he could remember.

Sam thought and thought about it, sitting there, very low to the ground, watching the Dome, and he finally thought of something he might do to them that they wouldn't like.

For he knew that they always put on the black, shiny things when they came out of the Dome, into his air, even into his air there in the room. And he thought (for he was cleverer than they thought he was) that the soft, ugly things put on the black, shiny things when they came out into his air because they didn't like his air just like he didn't like their air. (He had smelled it once, when some of it had leaked into his room; it was hotter than anything he had ever felt, and it made him very sick, and it hurt his eyes, so he knew that he didn't like their air, not at all.)

And maybe that was why they had the Dome, so they wouldn't have to live in his air.

And if they didn't like his air, maybe—

Sam was excited. He was so excited that he wanted to jump up and down, but he was afraid to, because they might see him and then come and get him and take him back to his room. . . .

Maybe, Sam thought, his air would make them not-alive. They wouldn't like that.

Sam crept down off the hill and then, when he was out of sight of the Dome,

he jumped up and down, and he squealed little squeals of happiness.

AFTER ten periods of the light, Sam was back again. The eleventh period was just beginning, and the bluish sun was purpling the horizon, way out over the mountains beyond the Dome.

And he looked down at the Dome and he smiled to himself and he felt very happy. It had been hard to do, but he felt very happy because it was done. He sat there on the top of the hill, looking down at the Dome, lying there under him, and he felt very happy.

It was a big, heavy thing, very big and very heavy.

It had been a long way away from the Dome, and he had had to move it at night (so they wouldn't see him) all the way to the top of the hill.

He had used big sticks that he had found in the woods to move it, and he was very strong, very strong indeed, stronger than they thought, and he had moved it, and now he was ready.

Sam had worked hard, almost all of the ten dark periods. He stood looking down on the Dome. (And he would break it with the big, hard thing like he had broke the barrier, once, with the table.)

It had been hard to roll, but he knew there was just a little more to do, now, and he put a stick under the big, heavy thing and he pried and pried, with all his might, until the big, heavy thing finally teetered on the ridge and then—

It began to roll.

Slowly at first, and then faster and faster as it headed down the steep slope toward the Dome, faster and faster and faster.

It hit the Dome.

It was very hard, and it hit the Dome.

Nothing happened at first, and Sam felt very bad indeed.

Then he could see, in the dim mists of morning, a dent in the Dome, a dent that

the big, heavy thing had made, and he thought it made a crack, too, over to one side, away from the dent, made a long, straight crack, as if it was a place not as strong as the rest that had cracked.

Three black, shiny things came out after a while.

Only three.

Sam thought that maybe that was all of them, that the rest were all not-alive.

There were only three, and Sam was stronger than they thought he was, and Sam would hunt them down, like he hunted things down that he wanted to eat of.

He began to clamber down the hill (and he was faster than they thought he was).

He caught the first of the black, shiny ones and threw it to the ground; he pounded at the barrier (through which he could see the ugly, white face) until it broke.

Then he started off after the other two.

The last one, Sam took his time with. After he had peeled the black, shiny thing off, he shook the not-alive thing that had been inside; all sorts of funny stuff fell

out and lay around Sam on the ground.

At last he threw the limp, white, ugly thing away and looked at the other stuff.

And one of the things started to move. It fluttered and moved in the mild breeze. Same thought maybe it was alive, and he ran after it and caught it.

But it was not-alive, and Sam turned it over and over in his hands. It was very light and very thin. Sam could almost see through it. Sam looked close at it; wrinkled his brow and looked hard at the funny, black marks on it.

Dear Bertha,

The Monster has been gone for nearly three Earth weeks. And, to tell the truth, I'm rather glad. I expect we'll close out this Experimental Station now and catch the rocket after next for home. So I'll be seeing you sooner than I thought.

After today, we are even going to stop looking for him. But since the whole purpose of the Station has merely been to mutate a human embryo and raise it to adulthood in an alien environment, I think we've done all that's expected of us. In fact, succeeded quite well.

We have, during the

Sam shook it very hard, but the black marks didn't come off.

Sam thought, then, that it might be good to eat. But he found out it wasn't.

OPINIONS, PLEASE



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The screen was filled with a flare of energy. . . .

THE UNDYING ONES

*Alone among the uncaring stars,
Donross stalked a mighty, in-
vincible prey—the thing that men
called Death!*

ON A tiny planet of a far, faint star in a globular cluster at the very edge of the galaxy, fifty thousand parsecs away—five times as far as man has yet penetrated into space—there is a statue of an Earthman. It is a tremendous thing, ten inches high, exquisite in workmanship.

Bugs crawl on it, but they have a right

By FREDRIC BROWN

to; they made it, and they honor it. It is unquestionably the figure of an Earthman, but it bears no real resemblance to its particular subject, for they never saw him. They know his name, though: Donross.

The statue is of very hard metal. On an airless world it will last forever—or until Earthmen find that world and blast it out of existence. Unless, of course, by that time Earthmen have changed an awful lot.

IT WAS a routine patrol in Sector 1534, out past the Dog Star, ten parsecs from Sol. The patrol ship was the usual two-man scout used outside the system. Captain May and Lieutenant Ross were playing chess when the alarm rang.

Captain May said, "Reset it, Don, while I think this out." He didn't look up from the board; he knew it couldn't have been anything but a passing meteor. There weren't any Terrestrial ships in this sector except their own little scouter. And that meant that there weren't any ships. Man had penetrated space for a thousand parsecs and hadn't yet encountered an alien form of life intelligent enough to talk, let alone build spaceships.

Ross didn't get up either, but he turned around in his chair to face the instrument board and the telescreen. He glanced up casually and gasped; there *was* a ship on the screen. He got his breath back enough to say "Cap!" and then the chessboard was on the floor and May was looking over his shoulder.

He could hear the sound of May's breathing, and then May's voice said, "Fire, Don!"

"But that's a Rochester Class cruiser! One of ours. I don't know what it's doing here, but we can't—"

"Look again."

Don Ross couldn't look again because he'd been looking all along, but he suddenly saw what May had meant. It was almost a Rochester, but not quite. There

was something *alien* about it. Something? It *was* alien; it was an alien imitation of a Rochester. And his hands were reaching for the firing buttons almost before the full impact of that had hit him.

Fingers on buttons, he looked at the dials on the Picar estimator and the Monold. They stood at zero.

He swore. "He's jamming us, Cap. We can't figure out how far he is, or his size and mass!"

Captain May nodded slowly, his face pale.

Inside Don Ross's head a thought said: "*Compose yourself, men. We are not enemies.*"

Ross turned and stared at May. May said, "Yes, I got it. Telepathy."

Ross swore again. If they were *telepathic*—

"Fire, Don. Visual."

Ross pressed the buttons. The screen was filled with a flare of energy, but when the energy subsided, there was no wreckage of a spaceship. . . .

ADMIRAL Sunderland turned his back to the star chart on the wall and regarded them sourly from under his thick eyebrows.

He said, "I'm not interested in rehashing your formal report, May. You've both been under the psychograph; we've extracted from your minds every minute detail of that encounter. Our logicians have analyzed it. You are here for discipline. Captain May, you know the penalty for disobedience."

May said stiffly, "Yes, sir."

"It is?"

"Death, sir."

"And what order did you disobey?"

"General Order Thirteen-Ninety, Section Eight. Quad-A priority. Any Terrestrial ship, military or otherwise, encountering an alien ship is ordered to destroy that ship immediately, if possible. If unable to do so, ship must immediately

blast off toward outer space, in a direction not exactly opposite that of Earth, and continue until fuel is exhausted."

"And the reason for that, Captain? I ask merely to see if you know; it is not, of course, important or even relevant whether or not you understand the reason for any ruling."

"Yes, sir. So there is no possibility of the alien ship following the sighting ship back to Sol and learning the location of Earth."

"Yet you disobeyed that ruling, captain. You were not certain that you had destroyed the alien. What have you to say for yourself?"

"We did not think it necessary, sir. The alien ship did not seem hostile. Besides, sir, they must already know our base; they addressed us as 'men'."

"Nonsense! The telepathic message was broadcast from an alien mind, but was received by yours. Your minds automatically translated the message into your own terminology. He did not necessarily know your point of origin or that you were humans."

Lieutenant Ross had no business speaking, but he asked, "Then, sir, it is not believed that they were friendly?"

The admiral snorted, "Where did you take your training, Lieutenant? You seem to have missed the most basic premise of our defense plans, the reason we've been patrolling space for the past four hundred years on the lookout for alien life. *Any alien is an enemy*. Even though he were friendly today, how could we know he would be friendly next year or a century from now? And a potential enemy is an enemy. The more quickly he is completely destroyed the more secure Earth will be."

"Look at the military history of the world! It proves that if it proves nothing else. Look at Rome! To be safe, she couldn't afford powerful neighbors. Alexander the Great! Napoleon!"

"Sir," said Captain May. "May I

ask—am I under sentence of death?"

"Yes."

"Then I may as well speak. Where is Rome now? Alexander's empire or Napoleon's? Nazi Germany? Or Tyrannosaurus Rex?"

"Who?"

"Man's predecessor, the toughest of the dinosaurs. His name means 'King of the Tyrant Lizards.' He thought that every other creature was his enemy, too. And where is he now?"

"Is that all you have to say, Captain?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I will overlook it. Fallacious, sentimental reasoning. You are *not* under sentence of death, Captain. I merely said so to see what you would say, how far you would go. You are not being shown mercy because of any humanitarian nonsense. A truly ameliorating circumstance has been found."

"May I ask what, sir?"

"The alien *was* destroyed. Our technicians and logicians have worked that out. Your Picar and Monold were working properly. The only reason they did not register was that the alien ship was too small. They will detect a meteor weighing as little as five pounds. The alien ship was smaller than that."

"Smaller than—"

"Certainly. You were thinking of alien life in terms your own size. There is no reason why it should be. It could be—even submicroscopic. The alien ship must have contacted you deliberately, at a distance of only a few yards. And your fire, at that range, destroyed it utterly. That is why you saw no charred hulk as evidence that it was destroyed."

He smiled, "My congratulations, Lieutenant Ross, on your gunnery. In the future, of course, visual firing will be unnecessary. The detectors and estimators on ships of all classes are being modified immediately to detect and indicate objects as small as a fraction of an ounce."

Ross said, "Thank you, sir. But don't you think that the fact that the ship we saw, regardless of size, was an imitation of one of our own Rochester Class ships is proof that the aliens already know much more of us than we do of them, including, probably, the location of our home planet? And that—even if they are hostile—the minute size of their craft is what prevents them from blasting us from the system?"

"Possibly. Either both of those things are true, or neither. Obviously, aside from their telepathic ability, they are quite inferior to us—or they would not imitate our design in spaceships. And they must have read the minds of some of our engineers in order to duplicate that design. However, granting that, they may still not know the location of Sol. Space coordinates would be extremely difficult to translate, and the name Sol would mean nothing to them. Even its approximate description would fit thousands of other stars. At any rate, it is up to us to find and exterminate them before they find us. Every ship in space is now alerted to watch for them—and being equipped with special instruments to detect small objects. A state of war exists. Or perhaps it is redundant to say that; a state of war always exists with aliens.

"That is all, gentlemen. You may go."

Outside in the corridors two armed guards waited. One of them stepped to each side of Captain May.

May said quickly, "Don't say anything, Don. I expected this. Don't forget I disobeyed an important order, and don't forget the admiral said only that I wasn't under sentence of death. Keep yourself out of it."

Hands clenched, teeth clamped tightly, Don Ross watched the guards take his best friend. He knew May was right; there was nothing he could do except get himself into even worse trouble than May was in—and make things worse for May.

But he walked almost blindly out of the Admiralty Building. He went out and got drunk, promptly, but that didn't help.

He had the customary two weeks' leave before reporting back for space duty, and he knew he'd better straighten himself out mentally in that time. He reported to a psychiatrist and let himself be talked out of most of his bitterness and feeling of rebellion.

He went back to his schoolbooks and soaked himself in the necessity for strict and unquestioning obedience to military authority and the necessity of unceasing vigilance for alien races and complete extermination whenever one was found.

He won out; he convinced himself. He even convinced himself how unthinkable it had been for him to think Captain May could have been completely pardoned for having disobeyed a definite order, for whatever reason. He even felt horrified for having himself acquiesced in that disobedience. Technically, of course, he was blameless; May had been in charge of the ship and the decision to return to Earth instead of blasting out into space—and death—had come from May. As a subordinate, Ross had not shared the blame. But now, as a person, he felt conscience-stricken that he had not tried to argue May out of his disobedience.

What would the Space Corps be without obedience?

How could he make up for what he now felt to be his dereliction, his delinquency? He watched the telenewscasts avidly during that period and learned that, in various sectors of space, four more alien ships had been destroyed. With the improved detection instruments, all of them had been destroyed on sight; there had been communication only on that first contact, the one he had been in on.

On the tenth day of his leave, he terminated it of his own free will. He returned to the Admiralty Building and asked for an audience with Admiral Sun-

derland. He was laughed at, of course, but he'd expected to be. He managed to get a brief verbal message carried through to the admiral. Simply: "I know a plan that may possibly enable us to find the planet of the aliens, at no risk to ourselves."

That got him in, all right.

HE STOOD at rigid attention before the admiral's desk. He said, "Sir, the aliens have been trying to contact us. They have been unable to because we destroy them before contact is established—or, in the case of the first contact, after a single telepathic thought had been put across. If we make that contact and permit them to communicate, there is a chance that they will give away, accidentally or otherwise, the location of their home planet."

Admiral Sutherland said drily, "And, whether they did or not, they might find out *ours*, by following the ship back."

"Sir, my plan covers that. I suggest that I be sent out into the same sector where initial contact was made—this time in a one-man ship, *unarmed*. That the fact that I am doing so be publicized as widely as possible, so that every man in space knows it—and knows that I am in an unarmed ship for the purpose of contacting the aliens. It is my opinion that they will learn of this. They must manage to get thoughts at long distances, but to *send* thoughts—to Earth minds, anyway—only at very short ones."

"How do you deduce that, Lieutenant? Never mind; it coincides with what our logicians have figured out. They say that the fact that they have stolen our science—as in their copying of our ships on a smaller scale—before we were aware of their existence proves their ability to read our thoughts at—well, a moderate distance."

"Yes, sir. At any rate, I am hoping that if news of my mission is known to

the entire fleet, it will reach the aliens. And knowing my ship is unarmed, they will contact me. I will see what they have to say to me—to us—and possibly that message will include a clue as to the location of their home planet."

Admiral Sunderland said, "And in that case, that planet would last all of twenty-four hours. But what about the converse, Lieutenant? What about the possibility of their following you back?"

"That, sir, is where we have nothing to lose. I shall return to Earth *only if I find out that they already know its location*."

"With their telepathic abilities, I believe they already do—and that they have not attacked us only because they are not hostile or are too weak. But, whatever the case, if they know the location of Earth they will not deny it in talking to me. Why should they? It will seem to them a bargaining point in their favor, and they'll think we're bargaining. They might claim to know, even if they do not—but I shall refuse to take their word for it unless they give me proof."

Admiral Sunderland stared at him. He said, "Son, you *have* got something. It'll probably cost you your life, but—if it doesn't, and if you come back with news of where those aliens come from, you're going to be the hero of the race. You'll probably end up with *my* job. In fact, I'm tempted to steal your idea and make that trip myself."

"Sir, you are too valuable. I'm expendable. Besides, sir, I've *got* to. It isn't that I want any honors. I've got something on my conscience I want to make up for. I should have tried to stop Captain May from disobeying orders. I shouldn't be here now, alive. We should have blasted out into space, since we weren't sure we'd destroyed the alien."

The admiral cleared his throat. "You're not responsible for that, son. Only the captain of a ship is responsible, in a case

like that. But—I see what you mean. You feel that you disobeyed orders, in spirit, because you agreed at the time with what Captain May did. All right, that's past, and your suggestion makes up for it, even if you yourself did not man the contact ship."

"But may I, sir?"

"You may, Lieutenant. Rather, you may, Captain."

"Thank you, sir."

"A ship will be ready for you in three days. We could have it ready sooner, but it will take that long for word of our 'negotiations' to get throughout the fleet. But you understand—you are not, under any circumstances, to deviate on your own initiative from the limitations you have outlined."

"Yes, sir. Unless the aliens already know the location of Earth and prove it completely, I shall not return. I shall blast off into space. I shall not deviate from that in the slightest way. I give you my word, sir."

"Very well, Captain Ross."

THE ONE-MAN spacer hovered near the center of Sector 1534, out past the Dog Star, ten parsecs from Sol. No other ship patrolled that sector.

Captain Don Ross sat quietly and waited. He watched the visiplat and listened for a voice to speak inside his head.

It came when he had waited less than three hours. "Greetings, Donross," the voice said, and simultaneously there were five tiny spaceships outside his visiplat. Not one, but five. The detectors and estimators registered now; he could tell that the five ships weighed a fraction less than three pounds each.

He said, "Shall I talk aloud or merely think?"

"It does not matter. You may speak if you wish to concentrate on a particular thought, but first be silent a moment."

After half a minute, Ross thought he heard the echo of a sigh in his mind. Then: "*I am sorry. I fear this talk will do neither of us any good. You see, Donross, we do not know the location of your home planet. We could have learned, perhaps, but we were not interested. We were not hostile and from the minds of Earthmen we knew we dared not be friendly. So you will never be able, if you obey orders, to return to report.*"

Don Ross closed his eyes a moment. This, then, was the end: there wasn't any use talking further. He had given his word to Admiral Sunderland that he would follow orders to the letter.

"That is right," said the voice. "*We are both doomed, Donross, and it does not matter what we tell you. We cannot get through the cordon of your ships; we have lost half our race trying.*"

"Half? You mean—"

"*Yes. There were only a thousand of us. We built ten ships, each to carry a hundred. Five ships have been destroyed by Earthmen; there are only five left. These five. You see before you the entire race of us. Would it interest you, even though you are soon to die, to know about us?*"

He nodded, forgetting that they could not see him, but the assent in his mind must have been read.

"*We are an old race, much older than you. Our home is—was—on a tiny planet of the dark companion of Sirius, far out; it is only a hundred miles in diameter. Your ships have not found it yet, but it is only a matter of time until they do. We were intelligent beings for many millenia, but we never developed space travel. There was no need and we had no desire.*"

"*Twenty of your years ago an Earth ship passed near our planet and we caught the thoughts of the men upon it. And we knew that our only safety, our only chance of survival, lay in immediate flight to the farthest limits of the galaxy. We knew,*

from those thoughts, that friendly contact was impossible; that we would be found sooner or later, even though we stayed on our own planet, and that we would be ruthlessly exterminated upon discovery."

"You did not think of—fighting back?"

"No. We could not have, had we wished—and we could not even wish. It is impossible for us to kill. If the death of one Earthman, even of one lesser creature, would insure survival of our race, we could not—would not—bring about that death.

"That you cannot understand. Wait—I see that you can. You are not like other Earthmen, Donross. But back to our story. When we learned we must flee or be exterminated, we took details of space travel from the minds of members of that ship and adapted them to the small scale of the ships we built.

"We built ten ships, enough to carry our entire race. But we find that we cannot escape through your patrols. Five of our ships have tried and have been destroyed. Half of our race."

Don Ross said grimly, "And I did a fifth of that. I destroyed one of your ships."

"You merely obeyed orders. Do not blame yourself. Obedience is almost as deeply rooted in you as hatred of killing is in us. That first contact, with the ship you were on, was deliberate; we had to be sure that—as we had thought—you would destroy us on sight.

"But since then, one at a time, our other ships have been trying to get through your patrols and the first four to try have been destroyed. We brought all five of the remaining ones here, when we learned you were coming out to contact us.

"Even if you disobeyed orders and returned to Earth, wherever it is, to report what we have just told you, no orders would be issued to let us through. There are too few Earthmen like you—as yet. Possibly in future ages, by the time Earth-

men reach the farthest side of the galaxy, which we are going to try to reach, there will be more like you and we will survive the second contact and be friends. Now the chances of even one of our five ships getting through your cordon seem remote.

"But now we may as well separate and try. Just possibly one ship out of our present five may get through. Good-by, Donross—what is that strange emotion in your mind, and that convulsion of muscles? It is something foreign to us. I do not understand it.

"Wait, I do—partially. Laughter is one word, humor another. But—Yes, it is your reaction to perceiving something incongruous. But your thought is too complex, too mixed. What is incongruous to you?"

Don Ross finally managed to stop laughing.

"Listen, my alien friend who cannot kill," he said. "I'm getting you out of this. I'm going to see that you get through our cordon and to the safety you want, on the galaxy's edge. But what's funny—incongruous—is the way I'm going to do it.

"You can't otherwise get through, because you'll be detected. But I'm about to take off for outer space, am I not, to die there? You, all of you, can come along, and live there. Hitch-hike. Your tiny ships won't show in the patrol's detectors if they're touching this one. Not only that, but the gravity of this ship will pull you along and you won't have to start using your fuel until you're forty more parsecs out, and through the cordon."

There was a long pause before the voice in Don Ross's mind said, "Thank you." Faintly. Softly.

He waited until five ships had vanished from his visiplat and he had heard five sounds against the hull of his spacer. Then Don Ross laughed once more. And obeyed orders to the letter, blasting off for outer space and death.



SHADOW ON THE HEARTH, by Judith Merril. Doubleday & Co.; \$3.00.

For Gladys Mitchell, the day started off like any other; Jon went to his office in the city, Virginia and Barbie went to school, and Gladys reluctantly climbed down the cellar stairs to the Monday morning laundry chores. By the time she came up again her placid suburban life was gone forever . . . for New York had been hit by the Bomb.

Judith Merril (whose lawful name, it should in all honesty be pointed out, is Mrs. Frederik Pohl) has to her credit some first-rate short science-fiction stories and the recent Bantam anthology, *Shot in the Dark*. Her admirers will want to add *Shadow on the Hearth* to their collections—not so much as a science-fiction novel, for the headlines have stolen the fantasy from this theme, but for a tender, moving and sometimes terrifying story of a housewife trapped on the fringe of an atomic war.

MASTERS OF TIME, by A. E. van Vogt. Fantasy Press, \$3.00.

Here are two short novels by one of science-fiction's most popular writers: *Masters of Time*, from which the book takes its name, and the slightly shorter *The Changeling*. Like almost all of van Vogt's work, the stories are fast-paced, dramatic and loaded with provocative

Conducted by Frederik Pohl

ideas. Like just as much of his work, the provocative ideas here on close examination sometimes turn out to be empty; and the speed of movement is occasionally achieved by a bewilderingly implausible series of leaps from event to event—a sense-free piling on of incident which resembles nothing in literature more closely than it does the story line of the Katzenjammer Kids.

The book is attractive and compact; the jacket, by Edd Cartier, will be an ornament to your library.

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, by Ray Bradbury. Doubleday & Co.; \$2.50.

Here are twenty-seven of Ray Bradbury's short stories and vignettes, many never before in print, linked together into a cohesive and entertaining story of the Earthmen's conquest of Mars. Bradbury's Martians are not octopus-bodied dahlias or entities of pure thought; they are people, more or less resembling your next-door neighbors, and their struggle against the Earthly invaders is conducted on a more subtle and vastly more enjoyable level than in the average interplanetary adventure. If you are one of the great majority who are Bradbury fans, you will find some of his very best work here,

much of it new to you. If you are one of the unfortunate few who are not, you'll find *The Martian Chronicles* a rewarding evening's entertainment.

FLIGHT INTO SPACE, edited by Donald A. Wollheim. Frederick Fell; \$2.75.

One of the signs that science-fiction is growing up is that it no longer suffices to throw a dozen stories together helter-skelter and label the result an anthology; the anthologist's job has been made harder, and the reader's pleasure has been enhanced, by the appearance of "theme" anthologies in which the stories themselves become integrated units in a larger work. If Martin Greenberg's *Men Against the Stars* anthology can be called the history of future space travel, *Flight into Space* is its geography. There are twelve stories in the book, each portraying an incident on one of the nine planets from Mercury to Pluto, and one each for the Moon, the Sun and the Earth. The writers represented include Stanton A. Coblentz, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Frank Belknap Long and the editor himself, perhaps the most noteworthy of the stories being Weinbaum's memorable *Parasite Planet*.

SEETEE SHOCK, by Will Stewart. Simon & Schuster; \$2.50.

THE GREEN GIRL, by Jack Williamson. Avon; 25¢.

When Jack Williamson was still in his teens he wrote a novel of strange adventure in a land under the earth, which was destined to become a classic of sorts in the new, struggling field of science-fiction; two decades later, his latest novel concerns the struggle for the mastery of contraterrene power in interplanetary space. By one of the quirks of the publishing trade, Williamson's first long story and his latest are issued in book form at the same time, forming an unusual alpha and omega—to date—of a brilliant and con-

tinuing writing career in science-fiction.

The Green Girl deserved its fame in the year 1930; it was and still is a passionately adventurous yarn which ensnares the reader in its first pages and doesn't let go until the very last. Melvin Dane, whose dreams since childhood have been haunted by the apparition of a lovely green girl, seeks her in a weird subterranean world inhabited by flying, man-eating plants and a strange creature of pure radiant energy. He finds her—and finds danger, too, in the form of an attempt to freeze the Earth's surface on the part of the beings from below. There is action enough for a dozen books before he battles his way back to topside and victory.

Seetee Shock—which is published under Jack Williamson's "contraterrene" pen name of Will Stewart—shows the development of an undisciplined youngster whose sole strong point was sheer force of imagination into a meticulous craftsman with words. It is the story of a space outpost where the energy of reverse "seetee" matter—positive electrons and negative protons—is harnessed to tame the Solar System, and on the intrigue and combat that surrounds it.

Seetee Shock has a four-color jacket by Collins.

OMNIBUS OF TIME, by Ralph Milne Farley. Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc.; \$3.50.

Eighteen pieces—not all can be called "stories"—and an introduction by one of the old-line science-adventure writers. It is hard to understand why some of the items ever saw print at all—eighteen pages of extracts from a novel which is about to be published in full, for instance, or two pages which had been cut from the author's previously published *The Radio War*—and even of the complete stories in the volume, many seem flimsy and routine. But *A Month a Minute* is here,

and so is *The Man Who Met Himself*; and for Farley fans the book may well be a valued and enjoyable addition.

THE RAT RACE, by Jay Franklin.
Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc.; \$3.00.

Bearing in mind that it was originally written for, and published in, one of the country's hugest mass-circulation slick magazines, *The Rat Race* is in some ways just about what you would expect. In others it is a startling and generally agreeable surprise. It has all the impeccable smoothness of the slick-paper weeklies—but, unlike the greater part of the genre, it is irreverent, forthright and very often hilariously funny. The story concerns a "Frank Jacklin" who is a wartime officer on a battleship which is transporting a thorium bomb; the civilian scientist who developed it, in what seems but actually is not a fit of madness, detonates it. The battleship, naturally, is volatilized; but Frank Jacklin somehow does not die. His body is destroyed; but his soul lives on in the flabby carcass of his former school-mate and present bitter enemy, the Wall-Street racketeer Winfred Tompkins. Winfred's love life is complicated enough; the personality switch makes for a great many ribald situations, all of which are fully exploited.

In and around all of the foregoing is a great deal of genuinely funny satire and belly-laugh comedy, involving a baffled but efficiently dangerous F.B.I. man, the "Great" war of 1941-45—the one between the Army and the Navy—and a number of plausible and exceedingly entertaining characters. No one is likely to call *The Rat Race* a great book. But no one, either, is likely to open it without reading all the way to the end.

DESTINATION MOON

Written by Robert A. Heinlein; a George Pal Technicolor Production, re-

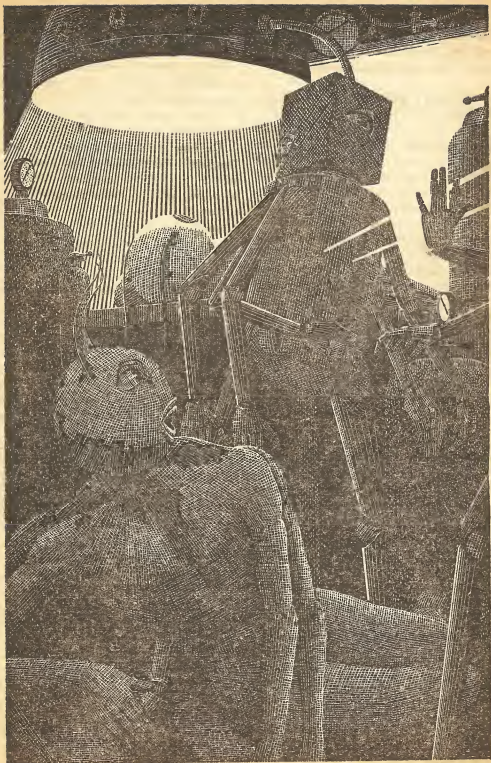
leased through Eagle Lion Films. Technical Art Advisor, Chesley Bonestell.


Not for almost fifteen years, since Gaumont-British gave us the memorable screen adaptation of H. G. Wells's *Things to Come*, has there been a motion picture as satisfying to science-fictioners.

The time is not too far away. The first "satellite rocket" attempt has blown up in the faces of its proponents—literally blown up, with a resulting storm of public protest that threatens to end rocket experimentation entirely. But three courageous men, a scientist, an Army officer cashiered as a result of the scandal, and an industrialist, keep on. And the fruit of their effort is man's first trip to the Moon.

In this picture you will *not* find people breathing without masks in empty space. You won't see tin-woodman monsters parading around, or phony "special effects" that look more like 4th of July fireworks than the scientific miracles they are supposed to represent. Every effort of Hollywood's incredible trick photographers has been expended in the direction of reproducing the exciting by-effects of interplanetary travel without calling attention to their own trickery. The result—as you would expect, bearing in mind that Chesley Bonestell was consulted at every stage of the film's production—is a first-rate science-fiction adventure.

Probably every living science-fiction fan knows and loves the work of Robert A. Heinlein, whose seven published books and uncounted magazine stories have won him a tremendous following. And readers of *Super Science Stories* have a particular interest in his career, for among his very first published stories, a decade ago, were those in this magazine—*Let There Be Light*, *Lost Legion* and others. And all the skill of imagination and wordcraft that made him one of *Super Science Stories'* favorite writers is now at work to make *Destination Moon* a first-rate film.





Stabs of destructive power
leaped from the robot's
body. . . .

*Beyond countless galaxies
it lay—the world of the thought
tyrants—where the deathless metal
men of Zor desperately battled to a
strange finish—a foe as indestructible
as they!*

THE MIND MASTERS

CHAPTER ONE

The Garden of Death

MYRRX fled down the long stone pathways through the Garden of Death. Along row after row of still, silent figures standing or sitting in lifelong posture she ran. She was not afraid of these petrified images, which

had once been flesh and blood like herself. They would not harm her. Neither could they help her, except by confusing the robots which pursued her. Five of the mechanisms were after her. Had it not been for her heaving lungs, she might

By NEIL R. JONES

have deceived them into thinking her one of the images. She had posed as an image and had lost the robots a few times, but they had not wandered away. They knew she was somewhere nearby, that she had not left the Garden of Death.

She fled to escape the law of her own people who were the masters of these machines they had created in such overwhelming numbers. She had become a fugitive from the great law of scientific mating which for centuries the Qurlgs had adopted and fostered. True, there were occasional dissenters, but the ruling few managed to stamp out any reversion to the old way of life. Myrrx had come into the world under the new order. She had no idea from whom she had sprung. She wanted Stluu. He wanted her. Stluu was looked upon as a radical-thinking psychopathic case and was now confined for treatment to rationalize his thought processes. Myrrx had been jeered at and pitied because of her mental weakness, and the Qurlgs warned her they would not tolerate such a throwback to Barbarism. Stluu had lectured that the scientific mating of the Qurlgs was gradually making the race more and more like the vast population of robots they had created to run their world.

Myrrx had started out into the world on her own rather than to submit to the will of her rulers. She had come a long way. The search for her had been a slow but relentless one, and now she was at bay. The Garden of Death was a large open-air mausoleum which extended for several miles. Many of the dead Qurlgs whose petrified bodies stood on their pedestals about her, or sat in stone chairs, had lived several hundred years before. Others were newer and brighter.

She stood quietly watching one of the perplexed robots examining a row of statues nearby, while his companions were systematically doing the same farther off.

The robot edged nearer, walking slowly on his two metal legs as his single great eye slowly scanned each statue. Myrrx knew that it was only a question of time before he would discover her, but it was a chance to rest, and how badly she needed it! All morning she had eluded the tireless machines in the Garden of Death. Only her wits and the ability to capitalize on the robot's shortcomings had prolonged the pursuit. Yet in the back of her mind, stark realization betrayed the end in store for her. She was nearing the end of the chase. The robots would catch her and take her back to her people for disciplining, probably like what Stluu was now undergoing. They had threatened to destroy his memory of her. She might just as well be a permanent ornament for this garden then, she thought, for her passion for Stluu was too strong for her to face the inexorable dominance of her civilization without him. Probably they would do something to her mental processes, too, and she would become as little concerned over personal preferences as this robot moving ever nearer to where she stood. Soon she would have to run again, perhaps for the last time. But she would use her final ounce of energy, she knew, to remain free and to escape her mechanized fate.

As the robot moved closer, Myrrx tensed herself, waited until she saw the mechanism go through the monotonous ritual it had repeated all the way down the long line of dead Qurlgs. The robot surveyed her motionless figure from in front of it, then moved to the side, turning its back towards Myrrx. With quiet speed, she turned and ran. Once she turned and looked back. Dismay struck at her heart. Two of the robots were chasing her. She knew that a radioactive alarm was ringing in the mechanical brains of the others, and they would try to cut her off. She zig-zagged through row after row of long-gone Qurlgs. This

gained her additional time but did not throw off the pursuit.

Then, at what she saw ahead of her, hope died in her breast. More metal figures. The remaining robots had cut her off. But even as she stopped suddenly, desperately seeking an avenue of escape, she noticed something different about these robots. Their bodies were metal cubes, not cylindrical like those she knew. Their heads were oddly shaped, too, like a cone with the apex upward. Instead of two legs, each one of these machines possessed four. Their arms were more like metal snakes than the six-jointed arms of the robots she had known. And where was the one great eye in the head? These robots possessed many small eyes around the base of the coned head. There was even one in the apex which looked directly upward. What new creation had the scientists of her world turned out? She dodged to run in another direction, conscious of the pounding metal feet coming up from behind her.

"Don't run! Don't be afraid!"

These thoughts in her brain froze her to inaction. They were associated with these new robots. One of the things had spoken without sound. She felt her thoughts being examined. A flash of realization that these were super robots came to her just as a pair of hard metal arms went around her, gently pinioning her against escape but careful not to injure her in any way. She had been taken. There had been too many of them for her.

SHE SAW at least ten or more of the coned-head robots watching-curiously the end of the chase. Alien thoughts entered her head. She suddenly realized that these new mechanisms were in no way associated with those which had taken her captive. Her quick wits sensed a vein of sympathy for her as their thoughts probed deeper into her consciousness.

"Would you be free if you could?" the thought wave entered her mind.

She babbled wildly in the affirmative, feeling her thought seized upon and the sound she made disregarded.

Several of the tentacled mechanisms walked forward deliberately to where the robot held Myrrx a prisoner, the one big eye balefully regarding the newcomers. Behind, the other four robots waited. This was outside their jurisdiction. Their instructions were to capture the female. They had done this. They were to bring her back. That, they were going to do.

Myrrx saw the leading cubed machine level a tentacle at the head of the robot holding her. A blinding flash leaped out, and she smelled hot metal. She felt the radiation of warmth from it and felt the pair of metal arms relax about her.

Another of the machines walked forward, and she felt the tentacles pull the metal arms of the wrecked robot free. She stepped toward the doubtful protection of her new friends. At least, she had escaped from the robots who would have taken her back to the hateful subjection of her kind.

The remaining four robots witnessed the end of their companion without feeling. But the female was free again. They had to bring her in. It was their one and only object. They leaped forward to seize her but were met by several of the alien machines who pinioned their metal arms with the snaky tentacles wrapped quickly about them, while four metal feet braced against the ground, and the four robots were thrown off balance and knocked to the ground. When they tried to rise, they were unbalanced once more. Several of the cubed mechanisms appeared carrying odd-looking weapons which they aimed at the floundering robots. The metal legs and arms were skillfully burned off, leaving the four heads and bodies helpless.

"What are you strange machines who have saved me, and who read minds and

talk with thoughts instead of words?" Myrrx asked them wonderingly.

"We are not entirely machines as you believe us to be," said one of them. "Once we were all flesh and blood creatures like you, in one form or another. Most of us are from one world in a far corner of the universe, a planet called Zor. I, myself, am from a different world called Earth. I was a professor who was interested in rockets, and also in preservation of the dead, at which I see you people have achieved enviable success. After death, I had my body shot in a rocket into space where for more than forty million revolutions of my planet about its sun, my funeral rocket carried my dead body on an endless pilgrimage about the planet of which it had become a satellite. I was found by my comrades here. Long ago, they had achieved immortality by transposition of their brains from organic bodies to these machines you see. They recalled my dead brain to life and made me one of them. Since then, I have become a fellow wanderer of space. We came in our spaceship to visit your world."

"I would some day be one of these," said Myrrx sadly, designating the statues about her, "but probably because of my scientific heresy the best that I can expect will be incinerated oblivion."

"We understood that you were in difficulties with your kind," said Professor Jameson, "by examining your thought processes."

"Then my people do not know you are here?" Myrrx asked.

"No. We circled your world several times and examined it, finding that it showed evidences of being peopled by a race of beings with advanced intelligence. We were keenly interested in these fields of statues, so we landed here first. We did not immediately realize that this was your means of preserving your dead. It is very wonderful. On my world and in my day, we buried our dead beneath

ground and let them decay. Here, you make ornaments of them. My companions and I did not immediately understand the character of these ornaments which we attributed to the art of sculpture, until we saw where appendages had been broken off—and then of course we knew."

"Why did you run from these metal slaves of your people?" 744U-21 asked her.

She told them her story. Meanwhile, the machine men of Zor examined her carefully. She was the first living native of this planet they had seen. Myrrx stood four and a half feet high. From her spherical head waved a pair of graceful antennae with which she picked up sound vibrations. Beneath a pair of extraordinarily large and expressionless eyes, a diamond-shaped mouth with four lips opened and closed excitedly. When Myrrx blinked, three eyelids drew together quickly like a camera shutter. Two pairs of jointed arms terminated in angular, six-jointed fingers. Her body, except for the curve of her hips, was slender. Six-jointed legs ended in small, dainty hooves reminiscent to the professor of small race-horses. Like the statues in the Garden of Death, Myrrx was unclothed, although she wore small ornaments such as bracelets and rings.

"I cannot return to my people," she explained, finishing her story.

"Where were you running to?"

"Just to get away," said Myrrx. "I had no definite place to go—only to keep on the move and escape. But I have found out that when one is marked and hunted, this is a small world indeed. I have been a fugitive over its broad surface a long time, disguising myself, stowing away on air vessels and staying in hiding, but always I had to run. It was not my own species I had to fear so much as the robots who were always on the lookout for me. They do not have much to carry in their mechanical brains, and my description

was broadcast to them. Please realize that these robots number almost a quarter billion, and their numbers still increase, while our dwindling species scattered over this world of Rm are less than half a million."

"Our spaceship is not far from here," said the professor. "You can take refuge with us. Possibly we can help you solve your problems."

WITH an escort of Zoromes, Myrrx was taken to the space ship at the outer edge of the Garden of Death. Several machine men also picked up the four heads and metal torsos of the fallen robots and brought them to the spaceship for scientific inspection.

Myrrx was made as comfortable as possible once they reached the spaceship. She was tired from the harrowing chase by the robots through the graveyard of the Qurlgs, and she slept.

She awoke next day shortly before the arrival of several airships. One ship came to rest, the others circling above. From the one on the ground emerged two male counterparts of Myrrx, followed by more than a score of the robots.

"What manner of machines are you?" queried one of the two Qurlgs, perceiving several of the Zoromes outside their ship. "Let me speak to your masters."

"We are our own masters," 6W-438 radiated. "We have come as friendly visitors to your world."

The Qurlg who had spoken turned and conferred with his companion. The machine men realized that although the Qurlgs talked among themselves, they directed their metal slaves by strong mental radiations. Professor Jameson, 744U-21 and several others now left the space ship and joined those already outside.

"It was not friendly to destroy five of our robots and imprison one of us," the Zoromes were told.

"We did not imprison one of your kind."

"You have Myrrx, a female. We demand that you free her."

"She is free. She stays with us by choice. We believe in freedom. We believe that the one you call Stluu should be free, too."

"I see that you have believed the tale of a silly, backward female. You will soon find it is better not to interfere in our affairs."

The two Qurlgs, followed by their robots, went back to their airship. Once they were inside, the ship rose quickly. The machine men counted eight of the air vessels. From the ship which had just visited them came a long, colorless beam which fastened upon the spaceship of the Zoromes. Myrrx ran out of the ship.

"They are going to carry your ship away with them!" she exclaimed excitedly as four more beams of attraction fastened on the spaceship from other circling craft. With alarm, the machine men saw their spaceship lifted from the ground by the combined rays. It rose from the ground slowly.

"20R-654!" Professor Jameson alerted the pilot. "The guns!"

Stabs of power leaped back along first one, then another, of the beams, and so rapidly did the ship free itself from the grip of the air vessels that it fell the short distance to the ground with a crash. On high, six wrecked airships plummeted downward to destruction. The remaining two did not tarry but picked up speed and disappeared into the horizon.

"That little fall did us no good," 20R-654 announced. "I cannot move the ship. There is no response to the controls."

"Which means more repairs," said 744U-21. "But I guess we more than evened things up. The Qurlgs and their robots will at least treat us with more caution."

CHAPTER TWO

Metal Masquerade

IN THE days which followed, the machine men learned from Myrrx what they could of the geographic features of Rm. Professor Jameson found that although the diameter of the planet, as they had seen on approach, was much less than that of his Earth, the land surface exceeded it, for there were only a few landlocked oceans. Rm was a denser planet, too, than Earth, and the gravity was therefore stronger.

"These robots of theirs are an interesting study," 168P-75 announced after several days of examination, during which time he and other machine men had taken them apart, reassembled and experimented with them. "They can be directed to follow a certain routine which they will follow without further direction from the Qurlgs, and even possess a limited ability to adjust themselves to new problems in the execution of their specialties. In other words, the Qurlgs can depend on these robots to do the tasks appointed them. Besides this, these robots can be made to act by direct mental orders of their organic masters. We ourselves, however, are unable to accomplish this. They pay our mental radiations no heed. There must be a secret to it, something we are unable to fathom. Too, there must be a way of tuning in upon their mechanical brains at a great distance with power transmitters of thought. And it is a question if all the robots operate and receive on the same wavelength. We have asked Myrrx, but she does not know. Only the scientists and leaders of the Qurlgs know these things, she says."

Meanwhile, Myrrx asked that the machine men try to free Stluu from the prison-hospital where they were going to change his brain, even as they would change hers if they caught her.

"If it can be done without starting a small war," the professor promised her. "We have probably killed a number of your people already, not counting the destruction of a good many of their robots, but this was to save us from their attack on our ship. Where is this place where he is imprisoned, and what it is like? How is it guarded?"

"From where we are, it is about nine hundred lengths of the distance you call a mile," Myrrx told the professor, "which is not far as distances overland go here on Rm."

"It is probably guarded by walls and by many robots," 744U-21 ventured.

"It is guarded by walls but not the kind you have in mind," Myrrx told him. "These walls are such that the robots can walk back and forth through them unharmed. You and I would die."

"Why?" asked Professor Jameson.

"They are not solid. They are walls of strong rays which destroy life. No Qurlg could walk through them. Nor could you with your organic brain."

"I see. Then their vigilance against an escape is not very alert because they do not expect one. Where does the power furnishing the rays come from? Where is it turned on?"

Myrrx shook her round head slowly. "Another secret," she said. "Certainly there is no control over it from inside the hospital, or else all the inmates might conspire to escape."

"What kind of fellow patients does Stluu have?" 744U-21 asked her.

"Mostly psychopathic cases, with a sprinkling of free-thinkers like Stluu whom the governing minority consider a danger or a nuisance."

"If we could get in there and get him out without an alarm—" mused the professor.

"You would have to be quick and sure," warned Myrrx. "They would kill him if they thought he had a chance of

escape. "And they are quite efficient."

"How high is this wall of rays?" 744U-21 queried. "Is it roofed over by horizontal rays?"

"It is about as high as the spaceship, or maybe not as high," Myrrx responded slowly, consulting her memory. "It is where I went first when I escaped, until I recognized the futility of ever having a chance to see Stluu even secretly. No, it is not roofed over. An airship might descend from the sky."

"Or winged Zoromes!" flashed the professor and 744U-21 in unison.

"Not knowing exactly where Stluu is would complicate matters," the professor concluded on sober reflection. "We would stir up a hornet's nest about us. Stluu might even lose his life. We must proceed by stealth."

"If we could only make these robots act for us," 744U-21 ruminated. "They could enter the prison-hospital and rescue Stluu."

"They couldn't bring Stluu back through the rays," Myrrx pointed out.

"They would have to take the mechanical wings in with them and conceal them somewhere. Only one robot would need a pair, the one flying Stluu out."

"744U-21!" the professor exclaimed, his thought waves vibrating with sudden inspiration. "The square heads of the robots are larger than our coned heads! Why couldn't a group of us have our heads placed inside the heads of these robots and so control the bodies ourselves?"

"Excellent, if it will work. We must find out what 168P-75 and his assistants can do with the idea. It would mean cleaning out the entire brain mechanism of the robot and substituting our heads, leaving the square shell as a disguise."

The plan was put to 168P-75. Eagerly they awaited his decision. He needed more robots, and an expedition was sent to the nearest of the wrecked airships. Those which were not too badly damaged

were brought back. After a bit of study and experiment, 168P-75 told them what to expect.

"The idea is sound, and it will not be too difficult to hook up control of the robot motions to our brain stimulus. What should take longest and prove the most trouble is the single big eye in the robot's head. Parts for it which now take up space needed by our own heads must be readapted and connection made to our own visual system."

168P-75 set to work, and succeeded in his first experiment with the head of 19K-59. Professor Jameson next offered himself, along with 6W-438, 199Z-073, 454ZQ2 and 7H-88. In appearance, no one could have told the difference between one of the disguised machine men and one of the robots. It was highly unlikely that the Qurlgs could find them out, for they could instantly perform any direct mental command made by one of the ruling species. It was 168P-75 himself who pointed out the one deficiency.

"You will have no way of receiving directions from the power transmitters. They are tuned to the individual wavelengths of the mechanical brains of the robots, and we can in no way compensate for the removal of this bit of apparatus. But where you six are going, it is unlikely that such distant orders will be given you. All orders will probably come from the Qurlgs in the hospital. Be careful not to give yourselves away by any act which would show more intelligence or initiative than the robots possess. Watch the other robots and do as they do."

UNDER cover of darkness, the six Zoromes started out. Following the directions given them by Myrrx, Professor Jameson and his five companions flew higher than it was possible for the airships of the Qurlgs to fly, straight for the prison-hospital where

Stuu was held. Behind, they left the rest of the Zoromes, under 744U-21, repairing the damage done to the spaceship in its fall. Once they were above the buildings, which were in an isolated spot, 199Z-073 was sent down to reconnoiter.

"Get into the grounds inside the ray-fence without being seen," the professor told him. "The first thing to do is to remove and hide your wings. Then look for an opportunity to guide us down unseen. We must not use our built-in ray projectors except as planned or in an emergency. One of the first things we must do after we reach there and become acquainted with the place is to do away with six of the least important of the robots, in case heads are counted."

As he dove groundward toward the dimly-lit patch in the dark far below, 199Z-073 carried a miniature thought transmitter 168P-75 had furnished him. He saw only a few robots about and swooped down, quickly removing and hiding his wings beneath a pile of metal junk. He walked around among the buildings. The few robots he passed gave him no notice. He finally advised his companions on high to circle lower and watch their opportunity to land. They joined him at the very spot where he had chosen to land, hiding their wings with his. The destructive ray-fence was scarcely visible, except for an off-color shade of green where it sprang up.

"We must find something to do," said the professor. "We must take the places of six robots and do their work. Idleness will invite detection. We had better spread out among the buildings and see what we can find."

The plan was put into execution. It was 6W-438 who made an important discovery in one of the larger buildings, and he guided the others to him. They found him in a high-ceilinged chamber where four robots were busy feeding bits of metal scrap into a furnace which glowed

a pale blue. The six Zoromes recognized the chance they wanted, and their ray projectors blasted the heads of the four laboring robots into fused wreckage. It took but a minute to toss the remains into the furnace.

"We still need two more," said the professor.

"Shall we go out and find them?" 454ZQ2 suggested.

"No," counseled Professor Jameson. "For the time being, let us six take up the duties of the four we melted up, and wait."

They continued the melting of the metal scraps. Another robot came and joined them in their work. Swiftly they took counsel among themselves. The latest arrival suffered the fate of his four companions and became melted metal scrap.

"One more to go," said 6W-438.

They continued this work until a robot came and motioned them to follow him.

"These things don't talk to each other, I hope," said 19K-59 nervously.

"168P-75 would have told us so if that had been the case," was 6W-438's opinion. "Any communication among them is very simple and elementary. Those chasing Myrrx were able to guide each other, but they were specialized robots trained in cooperative hunting."

In the days which followed, the machine men, disguised as robots, performed many tasks. They found another robot victim which they destroyed, maintaining the status quo of robots in the institution. Although they were never able to make an exact count, there were less than a dozen of the Qurlgs comprising the administrative staff inside the establishment, while the robots numbered more than a hundred. There were exactly a hundred and eighty-seven patients in the hospital, according to a big chart. The turnover in patients was a slow affair. Not many more came. Few were released.

New patients were brought in by air-

ship. Those who left went out the same way. These visits by air were exceedingly rare, they found. As the machine men suspected, a sizable minority of the patients, including Stluu, were political prisoners.

The professor walked close to the ray fence one day and cautiously moved an arm through the transparent wall. It did not affect the metal. He had seen several of the robots walk through it at different times. Of what it would have done to his brain, however, he had ample proof one day when a crazed patient ran through the wall, pursued by robots who caught up with him too late to save him. The mentally unbalanced Qurlg fell dead instantly on plunging through the dangerous curtain. The robots brought him back inside.

CHAPTER THREE

The Inquisition Machine

THEY had not been there long before the professor found Stluu; but he dared not contact him until they were alone. One of the Qurlg therapists was examining him.

"Do you still persist in your delusions?" the therapist asked.

"If you refer to my beliefs in sociological freedom, yes," he replied.

"You have a brilliant brain," the therapist said. "It would be regrettable to tamper with it. It is difficult to remove what is objectionable without possible danger to your intellect. Why not put these thoughts out of the way and convince us that you are sincerely reformed?"

"I shall never do so," was Stluu's stubborn rejoinder. "I could not live with myself."

"D you still feel this barbaric obsession for the female, Myrrx?"

"My feelings in the matter are unchanged," said Stluu. "Where is she?"

"What good would it do for you to know?" the therapist countered. "After we are finished correcting your ailment, which will be soon, it will never make any more difference to you. It will be as if she had never existed."

The professor, busy cleaning the room which Stluu occupied, waited until the therapist had gone.

"Stluu!"

The Qurlg raised his head, wonderment in his eyes as he looked all around the room and finally at the robot who stood motionless, the one great eye contemplating Stluu fixedly.

"Myrrx is in safe hands," Professor Jameson radiated. "She is planning to rescue you."

The machine man quickly explained who and what he was, how the machine men had rescued Myrrx and now planned to get him out of his confinement.

"We shall fly you out of here," the machine man told him. "Be prepared to leave at any time."

Further discussion was cut short by the entrance of another Qurlg of the administrative staff. That evening, the professor contacted 6W-438 and 19K-59.

"I've talked with Stluu. He is ready whenever we are. Pass the word along."

"The first good opportunity, then," said 6W-438.

Restricted use was made of their telepathic faculties. They never called very far to one another, often seeking each other by markings on their robot bodies, such as scratches and dents accidentally suffered during their duties about the institution. Professor Jameson could not escape a vague uneasiness that the Qurlgs might be able to pick up their mental radiations in some manner peculiar to themselves or to their science. Special robots might even be equipped for it. He could not get over the suspicion that everything was not going to be as easy as they had planned.

It was 199Z-073 who confirmed the professor's uneasiness. "The mechanical wings are gone!" he said.

"The scrap pile!" the professor exclaimed. "Has it been melted up?"

"No. Only the wings are gone from where they were concealed."

"We are now just as much prisoners as Stluu is," Professor Jameson pointed out. "There is no safety lane through the veil of rays."

"I am not so sure of that," said 199Z-073. "6W-438 told me today he is positive there are Qurlgs here who were not here when we came, and who did not come by airship."

The professor's duties finally brought him across the path of 6W-438. "What I learned was by noticing several new Qurlgs," he told the professor, "and by probing as closely as I could into their brains. I am sure there is another way in and out, but it is a closely guarded secret which the Qurlgs do not even think about."

"They must—sometimes," the professor insisted. "We must check on them and find where it is as quickly as possible. Otherwise, we may be too late. They are planning to operate soon and obliterate Stluu's sociological delinquencies. We must take a few more risks, if necessary."

The professor notified Stluu of the disappearance of the wings from their hiding place. He also told him they must find another way out.

"There is no other way out than by air," Stluu assured him, "at least to my knowledge. There has never been a time that the ray curtain has been turned off, either."

"How soon will it be before they operate on your brain?"

"Not very long. The new surgeon who came yesterday examined me. I suppose that means—"

"You are sure he came yesterday?" the

professor queried with sudden interest.

"Yes. I heard him mention it to one of our therapists here. He was totally unfamiliar with certain routines we have."

"Stluu, there has been no airship in or out of here for eight days. 6W-438 is right. There must be a secret way used by the Qurlgs."

"We had better find it, then," Stluu observed gloomily. "This surgeon is planning to operate on me tomorrow. His name is Plabfk."

The professor passed the word around among the machine men. The Qurlg therapist and his robot assistants were operating on Stluu tomorrow. There was a secret way out of the institution. They must find it, even if they risked discovery.

ALL NEXT day, Professor Jameson haunted the vicinity of Stluu's chamber on various pretexts, assuming various tasks and errands. He saw Plabfk come with a retinue of several robots. The professor's mind was made up; he must substitute himself for one of the assistants. He watched his chance. Meanwhile, Mrd, the head of the institution, and a powerful figure among the Qurlg oligarchy, came and gave Stluu a preliminary lecture which Plabfk considered a part of the treatment. Stluu was told the laws and customs of the Qurlgs which he had challenged and how this would be corrected. His brain would be examined later, and if there was no alteration or improvement of his opinions, then Plabfk would be allowed to proceed with the operation. It was during the long exhortation by Mrd that the professor saw his chance. One of the robots was sent upon an errand. The professor followed him to his destination and made short work of him, hiding the wreckage. He performed the simple task assigned to the robot and returned.

They were moving Stluu to a room equipped with an intricate maze of vari-

ous apparatus necessary for brain operations. He joined the group, following behind with the other robots.

Stluu looked on apparently unmoved as he was laid on a narrow table and a bulky machine swung above his head. A ray of light swept down over Stluu's face, and he lost consciousness. Plabfk then worked fast as Mrd, robots and Professor Jameson looked on. An oblong screen lit up. Strange configurations moved across it. Under Plabfk's skilled control, these reflections from Stluu's brain merged into coherence and clarity. There were both Qurlgs and robots in the picture. They came and went, faded out and returned. There stood Plabfk himself in the picture, while Mrd talked to him. These figures faded, and there stood Myrrx, clearer than the others had been and remaining longer. Plabfk watched carefully a dial on which various symbols rose and fell in conjunction with the pictured emanations of Stluu's brain.

"Question him," said Mrd.

Plabfk picked up a mouthpiece which led into the machine by a wire. "Have you given up your backward ideas, Stluu?" he inquired.

Immediately, a series of tiny hammers in the machine set up a musical translation, much as a typewriter might have done had each key been a different note. As if in immediate answer, the figures in the screen became warped and indistinct, breaking up into a mottled pattern which in turn disintegrated into many small, dancing particles. It was evident to them all that the question had agitated Stluu's brain considerably. Then the screen cleared, and objects commenced to take form. Qurlgs moved about in the picture. There were smaller Qurlgs, too, one of them tiny and held by a female Qurlg. The professor had not seen a small member of the species yet, Myrrx having told him they were brought up collectively in communities of their own. What Stluu's

mind dwelt upon under the stimulus of Plabfk's question was a family scene.

"Just as I suspected," was Mrd's comment. "The little talk I gave had no effect on him. Question him about the female, Myrrx."

"Are you ready to forget Myrrx and lead the normal existence prescribed by law and custom, renouncing any special claim to her?" Plabfk asked. "Do you at last realize that she has no right to pledge herself exclusively but belongs to the state itself?"

Again the musical cacophony of the hammers to a slightly different tune. This time, there was no confusion in the screen. Stluu's train of thought continued in the same vein under stimulation of the therapist's efforts. Myrrx once again came out strong and clear and remained.

"Operate!" snapped Mrd. "We must do the same to the female once we get her away from those machines!"

With two of the robots, Mrd walked out of the laboratory. This left the professor and three robots to help Plabfk who busied himself above the body of Stluu and assigned trivial tasks to the robots. The machine above Stluu's head was still running and an aftermath of independent thoughts moved sluggishly across the screen.

Plabfk probably became the most surprised Qurlg on the planet Rm as one of his robot assistants suddenly seized him in an iron grasp and whirled him away from his patient. In startled terror, the therapist saw stabs of destructive power leap from hidden recesses in the robot's body and annihilate the square heads of his fellow mechanicals. Excited fear that the robot's brain had gone unexpectedly berserk was frozen as a strong command issued from the thing.

"Call out for help and I'll do to you as I just did to the three robots! Take Stluu's body off the table and get on there yourself!"

Plabfk hesitated, then moved to the machine to turn it off.

"No!" Professor Jameson reached out a long metal arm and cold fingers closed on the therapist's throat. "Leave it as it is!"

"But the ray on me," Plabfk protested. "I'll lose my senses."

"You will be all right when you are taken away from it again, will you not?"

"Yes—but—"

"That is all I need to know," said the professor. "Take Stluu's place on the table."

Plabfk obeyed slowly, removing Stluu and putting him carefully in a chair used for other operations. "You—you are no robot," he said with some relief as he climbed up on the table. "You are one of those who came to our world in a spaceship. At least, you know what you are doing."

With some trepidation, the therapist lay down with his head under the light. He quickly lost consciousness. The screen, which had become temporarily blank when the therapist had removed Stluu, now changed pattern in a different color from that stimulated by Stluu.

The professor hesitated, considering the mouthpiece. He had no voice. What he wanted to know he had not trusted Plabfk to tell him correctly, even if menaced by death. This way was more certain, as he had already witnessed. He looked at Stluu. The Qurlg was commencing to revive. Professor Jameson shook him slightly.

"Come, Stluu, we must get out of here!" he radiated. "You must help find the way out!"

The Qurlg opened his eyes, gathered his faculties as the professor pulled him to his feet.

"Quick! Before anyone interrupts!" he warned Stluu, handing him the mouthpiece. "Speak into it!"

"What shall I say?"

"Ask him how he came here without passing through the rays."

Fully recovered, Stluu quickly grasped the situation and turned his attention to the machine under which Plabfk lay.

"How did you enter here?" asked Stluu. "You did not come by airship, nor did the veil of rays lift for you."

The many little hammers lifted one after another and played their appropriate tune. The screen went through the usual phases as Plabfk's brain seized upon the question; then the picture cleared. They saw the therapist enter a small building guarded by robots. Descending a series of stairways, he passed through several subterranean chambers. In one of these, countless rows of robots stood and watched him pass. He walked down a ramp into a tunnel and entered a small car which hung on a cable. The car took off into the darkness of the tunnel.

"Underground entrance!" the professor exclaimed. "I guessed as much! It was either that or else these Qurlgs wore a protective garment which neutralized the rays!"

Stluu shook his head. "There is no protection from those rays. They extend as far downward into the ground as they do upward. The only safe approaches are by air or by underground."

They watched the screen. Plabfk still sat in the car which was evidently moving. It was a long, fast ride. They watched the therapist leave the car and ascend a spiral ramp. At the top, a door slid aside, and he stepped in among other Qurlgs attended by robots. They recognized Mrd and several others who managed the institution. Plabfk was led through several chambers before they reached one where they sat down and talked among themselves, attended by the inevitable robots.

Stluu turned to the professor. "Do you recognize where that is? I have never been on the lower levels."

"It is near the storerooms," Professor Jameson told him. "There is a group of rooms where my duties have never taken me. We can find the place."

The professor sent out a strong mental call to his five companions. "Meet Stluu and me in the storerooms! We have discovered the way out of here!"

Leaving Plabfk on the table, they walked out of the laboratory and headed for the storeroom, hoping they would meet only robots on the way. It was not far. In the storerooms, they found robots working. 6W-438 was already there, and so was 7H-88. 199Z-073 had found it necessary to destroy two robot overseers, and 454ZQ2 had disobeyed an order given him by one of the Qurlgs, which was certain to stir up an investigation and trouble. 19K-59 was the last to come, having been the farthest away from the storerooms.

"We must hurry," the professor told them. "There is a long ride by underground cable car, and at the end of the ride there is another building—and robots."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Voice of Med

WITH Stluu, they hurried through room after room which both Stluu and the professor recognized from the pictures of Plabfk's thoughts. Not until they were in the last chamber did they see either robot or Qurlg. Here they found several robots guarding a massive door, the one through which the therapist had come. Two Qurlgs sat at a table and stared in surprise at the strange, unexpected party bursting in upon them without ceremony. Both Qurlgs leaped to their feet, their excitement communicated to the robots whose metal limbs jerked nervously.

"What are you doing here with one

of the patients?" one of them demanded, and then to Stluu: "You were to be operated on today!"

"I was," admitted Stluu, "but now I have other plans."

The robots sprang forward to seize the escaping Qurlg and were promptly met with a fusillade of destruction from the ray projectors of the disguised Zoromes. Their legs were partly cut from under them and their heads shot away.

"You will come with us," Professor Jameson told the two Qurlgs, "after you have opened this door."

With mixed surprise and bewilderment, the two Qurlgs considered.

"Unless you would like to have us do to you what we just did to your robots," the professor added.

"We can burn our way through the door anyway," 6W-438 reminded them and sprayed the metal door with his concealed ray projector, leaving as proof deep corrosions in the metal face.

One of the Qurlgs stepped forward and concentrated before the door momentarily. It slid noiselessly open, revealing a ramp which spiraled downward even as Plabfk had unwittingly shown them. Pushing the two captives before them, the six Zoromes and Stluu hurriedly circled downward where they found cars suspended from cables.

"There are too many of us for one car," the professor decided after a quick glance at the dimensions of the carriers. "We shall have to separate."

"How do they run?" 19K-59 inquired.

"They are a self-operating type," said Stluu.

"Suppose they cut the power before we get there?" 6W-438 suggested.

"The power is furnished by a generator in each car."

Into the first car went the professor, 199Z-073, 19K-59, Stluu and one of the captive Qurlgs. The remaining four boarded another car. The two cars

coupled together on the same cable and started off. Stluu, familiar with the mechanisms of his species, governed the speed of the little train as it sped through the dark.

"How do you know when to slow up?" 6W-438 asked Stluu from the rear car.

"There is an indicator. Yours isn't working because only the lead car furnishes power."

"Do you remember anything when the machine was probing your brain and you were being questioned?" Professor Jameson asked Stluu.

"No. I just went unconscious. The next thing I knew, you were handing me the speaker and it was Plabfk who was on the table instead of me. Why?"

"Because it may mean our reaching the other end of this tunnel and escaping without any trouble. They won't know where we have gone."

"It won't take them long to find we are gone," said 454ZQ2 pessimistically. "We left too much excitement behind us. At least I did."

"And the wrecked robots in the last chamber we left," 6W-438 added. "We should have dragged them on the other side of the door."

At last, they reached the end of the tunnel. The professor, in conference with Stluu, and by doing some figuring, found they had traveled more than eight miles. They climbed out of the cars. All was silence as they walked up the steep ramp.

"Any alarm on your part," the professor told the hostages, "will meet with instant death."

Cautiously, they made their way to the top of the ramp. The professor and Stluu recalled that the therapist had come through many underground chambers before reaching the ramp. To escape, they would have to do the same. Somewhere about the building, they were bound to find Qurlgs, and they had seen Plabfk pass a roomful of robots.

"If our two hostages give no outcry, I may be able to handle the robots by misleading them," advised Stluu, "unless they already have their orders regarding us."

"I haven't your confidence," the professor told him. "We'll be prepared to fight it out with our ray projectors."

At the top of the ramp, they glided through the doorway on the alert. The room beyond was empty. The professor and Stluu peered into the next chamber which was both long and wide, the others close behind them. Stluu gasped and stepped back, and Professor Jameson's nerves fretted at the controls of his built-in twin ray ejectors. There were more than a thousand of the robots, the most he had ever seen at one time, standing silently waiting for them. Something about their attitude was reminiscent of Plabfk's passage through the same chamber. Stluu's four lips vibrated in quick little slapping sounds which passed for laughter among the Qurlgs.

"Do not fear to pass by them," he said. "They are inactivated."

"A reserve supply," muttered one of the hostages. "They first have to be activated by remote control."

Yet it was an eerie experience passing among their quiet ranks, and Professor Jameson could not help thinking what might happen if these thousand or more robots should suddenly be imbued with action and special design, say from the laboratory of the institution they had lately quitted or from a central control. He could not shed his uneasiness as easily as Stluu. He had expected opposition of some kind.

THEY passed by the big storeroom of the robots and through several more rooms in which were stored various machines and more of the robots. The professor was feeling that his fears had been groundless when suddenly a

deadly veil sprang across the doorway, blocking their path to escape. And through these rays leaped a horde of the robots flourishing strange contraptions which they held out before them and gripped in four of their metal hands. The four handles were grouped about an inner mechanism from which a pair of long, slender shafts projected and terminated in a square grid.

"Attractors!" warned Stluu. "They will draw metal to them! Don't let them get close enough to trap you!"

But already 19K-59 was sliding across the floor, his metal body ringing against the metal grid carried by one of the robots. His ray ejector riddled the square head, and the robot dropped the weapon. The rest of the Zoromes were firing at the robots, but more of them continued to replace those shot down and picked up the attractors. 19K-59 walked awkwardly with the one still clinging to him. A pair of robots seized the handle. 6W-438 shot them both in the head.

Professor Jameson seized one of the disabled robots and hurled it at the grid of another one advancing upon him. The robot's body struck the grid with a clang and stayed there. The rest of the machine men, recognizing the strategic value of the move, did likewise. The robots were soon busy at the controls of the magnetic contrivances, trying to free them from the wreckage of their companions, oblivious to the fact that five of the Zoromes were knocking them out almost as fast as they ran through the veil of rays. While 19K-59 fired, 454ZQ2 was busy burning away the long prongs fastened to the attractor grid, leaving only the square grid affixed to the machine man's robot body.

An amplified voice rang out through the chamber. "Surrender, you Zoromes, you can escape neither way! Stluu, we have you again! We must get on with the operation—or else make of you a petrified

corpse to stand in the Garden of Death!"

It was the voice of Mrd. The rush of the robots gained volume. The machine men retreated. Instantly, another veil of rays dropped across the threshold as they backed into another chamber. But 19K-59 and 454ZQ2 were left behind, sealed off, along with the two Qurlgs they had brought with them as hostages. Stluu was still with the professor's party.

"We must try to reach the ramp and the tunnel!" the professor exclaimed.

As they fled, they saw the trapped machine men go down beneath the onrush of the robots, and for a moment this diversion stopped the metal horde from rushing through the second veil of rays. The fugitives were but halfway across the broad chamber of the inert robots when a third veil sprang up across the threshold leading to the ramp. Again, they were closed off. The net had drawn tighter.

"Hide among these robots!" Stluu told them. "You cannot save me now! You may still find a chance to escape! They will not kill all of me! They only want to kill a part of me, my old self!"

Professor Jameson recognized the wisdom of this. He also realized that in the fierce combat which might follow Stluu could easily be injured or killed in the wild confusion where all robots looked alike. There was no denying that the situation was desperate.

Quickly, the four Zoromes dispersed themselves among the inactive robots. The mechanical minions of the Qurlgs which came rushing through the veil of rays carefully secured Stluu and looked about them quickly, then vacantly, for the robots they had pursued. Everywhere stood the quiet, inactive robots, hundreds of them. In futile quest, the robots searched among their stored counterparts for the Zoromes. One of them stopped before Professor Jameson and stared him full in the face for a moment, then moved on, hopelessly confused. In quiet relief, the professor

realized that the greater majority of the inactive robots were at least slightly used and bore scratches, worn spots and other marks the same as their own bodies.

The machine men saw the rays stop long enough for several robots to lead Stluu down the ramp to the tunnel. Stluu was being taken back again to the institution. After his passing, the rays flashed on again.

Once more they heard the voice of Mrd. "You may make yourselves anonymous among the inactive robots, but we shall search you out. You may as well give up. None of you machine people, including those in the spaceship which brought you, will ever leave Rm. We have dealt your ship another blow. Did you know that we had captured one of your fellows? He calls himself 29G-75. We pulled him down while he was flying above the institution quite some time ago. We put him under the machine you have already seen at work, and we found that we had six aliens among us. We searched for and found the wings, then waited to see what you would do. Soon, we shall catch more of your people—and Myrrx. There is no hurry. They are going nowhere. We find your science a bit novel, but we are learning fast, and we do not find it up to our own standards. That is only to be expected, since you are derived from a civilization with a sociology much like what Stluu preaches."

Robots wandered among their inactive counterparts, searching for the machine men, looking for identifying marks. An over-inquisitive robot who wandered too far away from his fellows received a shot in the head from 6W-438. He, too, became inactive. The four machine men continued this furtive sniping until the Qurlgs in the further chambers became aware of what was happening. All active robots were then withdrawn.

For a time, nothing more happened. Then came a subtle suggestion of move-

ment throughout the chamber, and the horde of inactive robots suddenly came to life and moved about.

"Now what do we do?" 199Z-073 wanted to know.

"I expected this sooner or later," said the professor. "We shall move around with them, watch them and act the same as they do. It may be our chance to escape."

The ray curtain lifted at one end of the broad chamber. The machine men, sensing a trap, made no rush to escape. The veil of rays on the threshold leading to the ramp still remained. More robots entered from the opposite doorway carrying huge pieces of apparatus which they set up at one end of the big chamber and joined together.

"It is some kind of a detector which will sort us out," 7H-88 ventured.

When the robots finished erecting the machine, the curtain of rays once more sprang into action and both exits were again guarded. Slowly, the recently activated robots commenced to file through the curtains of rays in both directions.

"There is the means by which we shall be sorted," said the professor grimly.

More than half the robots had gone either one way or another when again they heard the voice of Mrd, who was probably at a safe distance watching by television.

"What! Do I see laggards who hang back? Could it be that they do not like the purifying bath of the green light? I can assure you it will disinfect your metal bodies thoroughly. Every microbe will be destroyed—and any other form of organic life in or about the metal bodies. We do not like our robots to carry or breed germs. They are regularly disinfected, especially after being laid away like this over a period of time. Any robots with peculiar ideas of their own are invited to line up against the machine at the end of the room. Incidentally, may

I say that robots with ideas of their own are not supposed to exist. Any peculiarity of their actions invites suspicion that their brain mechanism is defective. All perfectly functioning robots are now leaving the room."

IT WAS inevitable that only four of the robots should remain in the big empty room. During the exodus of the robots, Professor Jameson had walked close to the machine with the passing throng headed for the ramp and the tunnel and had closely examined it. There was a big flat grille through which he could look at the main parts. He had his suspicions as he circled back towards the further end of the chamber, thinking that Mrd's sharp eyes had not missed his avoidance of the exit. Now, the voice of the Qurlg rang triumphant.

"So. We have four robots with ideas of their own. Let us see what happens to those who are willful."

The machine men all at once felt drawn toward the machine. 199Z-073 suddenly went rolling and sliding up the long floor and slammed against the grillwork so hard that he lost his senses from the impact as the sound echoed and reechoed back and forth across the empty room.

"Just a big magnet," said the professor.

He yielded to the attraction and slid up the floor, braking himself with his feet to avoid the uncontrolled and violent contact of 199Z-073 as he hit the grille. 6W-438 and 7H-88 followed. They were helpless. Now the curtain of rays disappeared, and robots came in bearing tools and other accessories. The four machine men were securely welded to the grillwork, after which many robots carried the grille bearing the four Zoromes up out of the building. A big airship awaited them, and the grille was shoved aboard and dropped flat.

How far they traveled, they did not

know. But it did not seem to be a long trip. When the grille was carried from the airship, the four Zoromes saw a squat, massive building which loomed ugly and forbidding before them. There seemed to be only one entrance, and they were carried through this on their grille down a long corridor and into a bare stone chamber oddly fashioned with rounded corners. From the ceiling, a luminous quality of its components spread a ghastly purple glow. A peculiar odor hung in the air and was heavier where green stains discolored the floor and walls. Small holes were regularly spaced halfway up from the floor, while larger openings, obviously vents, punctured the stone floor. A set of steps ascended to a low doorway in the ceiling and continued on upward. The robots busied themselves applying a liquid from a plunger at every point where the metal bodies had been welded to the grille.

"A solvent," said 7H-88. "At least, we shall be free of this."

During the time the solvent was working, the robots hurried out. There followed a shuddering, grinding of stone upon stone, as if massive walls had moved, and the machine men were left alone.

The professor suddenly discovered he could free a metal arm. The solvent was working fast. 7H-88 was the first to step free. Then above them, they heard the sound of metal upon stone. Looking up, they saw metal feet come into view on the stairs, and slowly descending came one of the machine men, followed by robots. It was 29G-75, and the two who followed were 454ZQ2 and 19K-59.

"What happened?" the professor asked 29G-75.

"I was taken prisoner, brought down by one of their infernal attractors while flying above the place where six of you went to rescue Stluu. 744U-21 was becoming concerned about you. I have been imprisoned here alone for some time—

until 19K-59 and 454ZQ2 joined me not long ago."

"How is everything back at the spaceship?"

"The Qurlgs came again and bedeviled our controls with their beams before 20R-654 could shoot down one of their airships. We were once again busy making repairs when I left. 168P-75 is still experimenting with the robots. He claims to be able to control the ones which he has specially adapted to our mental plane. The last ship we shot down was manned entirely by robots."

The voice of Mrd broke in upon their conversation. "Well, here we all are together, and you won't have any chances again to play tricks. So many thicknesses of stone and metal are between you and the open air that it would take your friends a year to reach you. This was once a building where we petrified criminals. You are in the old vat. You see, we do not always wait for death to employ the process. Much better results can be obtained before death. Condemned criminals and those we know are about to die we always petrify before death. It accounts for the lifelike semblance of many of the statues you saw in the Garden of Death. Stluu and Myrrx may suffer this fate if we should not operate successfully."

"You do not have Myrrx!" exclaimed the professor angrily.

The smug confidence of the Qurlg put him out of temper. But Mrd, who was a long way off, had no way of receiving their thought emanations. He rambled on enthusiastically.

"I am giving you super-intelligent machines the key with which to open the way out of this prison of yours. It works as well from the inside as from the outside. Walk to the doorway where you entered by the corridor. Remember how long that corridor was? That is the thickness of the door you must move. Place your metal hands against it. Then think hard of the

five objects I tell you about each in turn, for only thought waves will set in motion the mechanism operating the door. First, concentrate briefly on a living Qurlg, any particular one. It doesn't matter. Second, concentrate on the rising sun. Third, think of the noonday sun, above you. Fourth, picture in your mind's eye the sunset. Fifth, and last of all, think strongly of a dead Qurlg you have seen in the Garden of Death. This is the only way the door will open."

There followed a brief silence. It was broken presently by the unmistakable slapping merriment of Mrd's lips. It was inevitable that there should be a catch to it somewhere, and the machine men had felt no hope, only wonderment. Mrd unfolded more information in great enjoyment.

"You machine creatures could stand against that door from either side and concentrate until doomsday, or until the prison crumbled to dust, and nothing would happen. Both the symbols involved and the procedure I have given you are accurate, but it requires the brain of a Qurlg to move the mechanism, and your own brains are woefully deficient. Yet no Qurlg will do this for you. Stluu would if he could, and if he knew the combination of thoughts, but he can't and doesn't. When Plabfk gets finished with him, he won't even remember you.

"We are going to let the rest of your machine men from Zor learn the five symbols. We want them to come and try to get you out. Then we can catch them and put them in with you. It would be like Myrrx to come and try to save you, once they learn that only a Qurlg can open the prison. We hope she does. She will be seized by robots about the prison who are still doing work outside. But first let her try. It will be a good try, for she is a Qurlg, but she cannot quite do it because she is a female. The mechanism was fashioned with that in mind, and the con-

trols are delicately balanced. Because she is feminine, the lock will only be agitated a bit. It will not respond. I hope your loneliness will be relieved soon with the arrival from time to time of more of your companions. We know they will come."

"WHAT do you think of that?" 6W-438 asked when Mrd had finished, and they were once more alone with their thoughts.

"They have no desire to do away with us, at least yet, thanks to their ego," said the professor.

"Do you suppose Mrd is telling the truth about the gate and the symbols?"

"Yes, he probably is."

"Let us try it, anyway," 199Z-073 suggested. "It can do no harm."

They went to the entranceway where the professor spread his metal hands against the door and concentrated briefly in turn upon Stluu, the rising sun, the noonday sun, the setting sun and then upon one of the statues to which he recalled paying particular notice in the Garden of Death. They waited. Somewhere in the depth of the stone they heard a low, rattling click, but the door failed to move.

"It did something!" 6W-438 exclaimed.

In turn, each of the seven Zoromes tried it, with the same result each time.

"Our mental radiations are stronger than those of the Qurlgs," Professor Jameson pointed out. "Perhaps if we concentrated less, we might move the lock."

They tried this. A few times the lock failed to respond with its usual encouraging sound. They tried it together, all of them; they also tried it in groups of from two to six. They concentrated with all the possible arrangements of the five symbols, suspicious that Mrd might have been setting up a sly joker for them, or that they might chance on a lucky solution peculiar to their own intelligence.

But in this they were disappointed. Nothing at all happened when any of the five symbols were displaced, left off or repeated. Only in the order given them by Mrd did they yield the hopeful sound from inside the rock.

"Suppose he left out something purposely?" 454ZQ2 suggested.

The seven Zoromes experimented with this idea, thinking up all manner of objects or circumstances peculiar to the Qurlgs or to the planet Rm, getting the same results they had encountered in leaving off or changing the symbols around. Nothing at all happened.

"I think that Mrd was telling us the truth," the professor decided.

The machine men explored an upper chamber above the vat room. It contained rusting machinery and ducts for the peculiar liquid which had been used in petrifying the Qurlgs and which had left its odor behind it. The only way in and out of the grim pile was past the ponderous barrier on the lower level.

In the never-changing purple gloom of the vat chamber, the machine men had but little conception of the passage of time. It was broken finally by distinct thought radiations from outside the squat structure. A machine man was out there. Eagerly they probed his thoughts. It was 41C-98. He was trying the door with the thought symbols. He was also firing on robots with his ray projector. They caught a mental reflection that an airship of the Qurlgs had quickly appeared above the frowning edifice, and that above the atmosphere where the airship could not go 27E-24 was flying and watching what went on below with powerful lenses, also equipped with a thought amplifier.

"Go—before it is too late!" the professor warned 41C-98. "You cannot open the gate yourself! No Zorome can do it! A Qurlg must think the five symbols—a male Qurlg! Do not let Myrrx come and try! It is a trap for her!"

They heard the impotent click of the lock from the depth of the stone. 41C-98 was in difficulties. He was besieged by robots with their gravity weapons. He was shooting them down rapidly, but the airship had circled lower. Now, a strong beam reached down and seized him, and he was unable to move quickly. It almost lifted him off the ground, toying with him while the robots ran up to secure him. The beam lifted him and let him fall just before the robots leaped in and held him immovable.

It was soon over. The company Mrd had promised them was coming; they had captured eight of the Zoromes. Twenty-seven remained still free. The robots were waiting for a Qurlg to come and open up the ugly prison into which they were ready to cast another of the Zoromes from the space ship. Through the eyes of 41C-98, the imprisoned seven saw the airship come to rest not far from the building; a Qurlg stepped out and walked to the entrance.

"Get ready to run out!" the professor alerted them. "This may be our chance! Shoot and run! Try to reach the airship and take it over!"

The seven machine men stood ready, waiting for the massive wall to slide away from across the threshold. As if in answer, to mock them with futility, a curtain of the deadly rays sprang up across the corridor entrance. They dropped back in dismay. But they caught the mental concentration of the Qurlg, and the symbols used were the same as Mrd had given them. The massive stone wall rolled back, groaning and scraping, with a sound behind it like clockwork.

The light green veil mocked them. Through the thin haze they saw the robots bringing 41C-98. Like 29G-75, he was his undisguised, cubed self, and he still wore his metal wings. The veil disappeared from the inner threshold, but near the outer threshold they saw another one

spring into sight. The robots shoved the prisoner in among his comrades, and instantly the ray curtain sprang up to guard them from the machine men once more. The robots walked down the corridor and straight through the further veils of rays, and the ponderous wall rolled back into place with a grinding vibration which shook the stone beneath their feet.

"It was futility itself to come and do what you did," Professor Jameson told 41C-98. "But 27E-24 must have seen and heard what went on, and the others are warned. How is the repair of the spaceship going?"

"Very slow," was 41C-98's pessimistic reply, "but we won't be caught napping again. We keep flying sentinels now, and we have also set up two anti-airship defenses separate from the spaceship itself."

"How did you learn of the secret symbols?"

"59V-5 picked up the information while flying around the building with a thought amplifier."

"They could probably have picked him up had they wished, as they did you and 29G-75, but they wanted him to carry back the information. I hope that 27E-24 escapes them."

"He was too high for them to reach," said 41C-98. "It would not be possible to pick him up with a beam from that altitude, no matter how high their ships flew."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Martyrdom of Flesh

FOR a long time, it seemed, the eight machine men of Zor languished in the purple gloom of their prison. Occasionally, especially after the arrival of 41C-98, they experimented with the thought-lock of their prison, but with no better results than hitherto obtained. The

best they could do was to elicit the responsive but impotent clicking noise. They spent much time in the upper chamber, too, examining the abandoned machinery, and they looked for another means of egress from the dismal keep but found only bare walls with here and there the small orifice of a ductway, and these all seemingly led to the vat room below. The professor showed more interest in the pair of drains in the floor of the vat room.

"It is where the liquid used in petrifying the prisoners was drained away. These drains either go outside or else deep into the ground."

"They are much too small for the passage of our bodies," 6W-438 observed.

"But not for our heads," the professor countered.

"What means of locomotion would we employ if the drain did go outside, and what good would a helpless head be, once outside?"

The professor had no answer to this. It was just another of their ideas ending against a blank wall. Yet all the machine men had to do was to think. To think and to wait.

Under these circumstances, the sudden grinding movement of the great sliding door with its accompaniment of shuddering vibrations was a singular event, even though it heralded the capture of another machine man. They sent out a mental probe to ascertain which of their luckless companions had been the latest victim. Their search met with only vacancy.

"Knocked out!" said the professor.

They watched for the ray curtain to spring up across the inner threshold. 29G-75 and 41C-98 clattered across the stone floor of the vat room to look down the corridor.

"The way is clear!" 29G-75 called back excitedly. "There are no rays at the further end, either!"

Unmindful of danger, the eight Zoromes raced along the narrow passage, the out-

side world framed to their view by the end of the corridor. They were fearful that a delayed action of the ray curtain might catch them at the final moment in their headlong flight, when it would be too late to check their momentum in a plunge through certain death.

They burst out into the open. In the near distance, they saw their spaceship. It was behaving strangely, hanging sideways and upended a bit in the sky, as if its balance of gravity were lopsided. It fired savagely at an airship above. The airship was trying to fasten an attractor beam to the spaceship. In the distance, another of the Qurlg's aircraft approached. The spaceship hung low above the ground like a wounded bird and moved in a crazy lurch towards the forbidding citadel the eight Zoromes had just left.

They looked about them. Robots contemplated the machine men in surprise. One robot commenced running in the direction of the spaceship which now seemed to be trying to land. The other robots started to close in upon the escaped prisoners. The ray projectors of the six robot-Zoromes were unimpaired, and they spread destruction about them. Both 29G-75 and 41C-98 had lost their weapons when captured.

"Fight your way to the ship!" Professor Jameson radiated. "744U-21 is trying to land and pick us up!"

41C-98 rose into the sky on his mechanical wings and headed for the lurching spaceship. The rest of the machine men hurried as fast as their metal legs would allow, pausing to shoot at robots which might intercept or overtake them in their flight.

With dread, they saw the attractor beam of the nearest airship catch hold of the disabled spaceship and swing it around lazily. The spaceship slowly rose. Then, something happened up in the sky. Bright flashes darted at the airship from several

angles, and one end of the craft swung groundward, the beam flitting crazily around and the spaceship, free, once more settling to the ground.

Meanwhile, small black specks flitted about the disabled airship and more bright flashes struck it. The ship of the Qurlgs commenced to fall, gaining acceleration in its drop. It struck the ground, the shattered hulk sending up a cloud of dust. One of the black specks darted groundward in the direction of the machine men. It sped past above their heads and opened fire on the robots pursuing them.

"Flying Zoromes!" 6W-438 exclaimed. "They attacked and brought down the airship!"

The machine men were rapidly overtaking the robot who ran ahead of them, still in the direction of the spaceship. Fearing that the robot might be on a special mission to blow it up, the professor let loose a few discharges from his ray projector, catching the robot in the body and on one leg. The robot limped and stumbled, then turned and stopped running as it watched the machine men's hurried approach.

"Don't fire at me!"

The radiation came from the robot, from the brain of a machine man. 168P-75 had evidently made another hybrid with a machine man's head inside a robot. The professor did not recognize the new robot conversion. There was something familiar about the radiation, however.

"Who are you?" he asked as the machine men came up with him.

"Myrrx!"

"You came and released us!" The professor grasped the fact in spite of his surprise. "You changed yourself to one of us!"

"Yes! It was the only way!"

"Then 27E-24 received our message! But you are a female, Myrrx! The brain of a female supposedly could not quite

work the thought-lock, or at least so Mrd claimed!"

"I am a Zorome, now," she corrected him, "with the brain of a Qurlg. The handicap of being a female is removed."

"And you had 168P-75 convert you to a robot body," Professor Jameson mused, "so that you might mingle with the other robots and approach the door of the prison unnoticed and unchallenged."

"Why not?" she asked. "I might better become one of you than realize my eventual destiny, a statue in the Garden of Death."

"What of Stluu?"

"He is probably operated on by now, and is no longer the Stluu I knew and who knew me." Myrrx spoke in sober retrospect as of someone she had known long ago.

The professor pondered the matter. Behind them, the robots had either fallen in ranks from the wholesale destruction of 60M-64 who flew back and forth over their heads, waving a flashing heat gun, or else had been called back by the Qurlgs watching the scene from some distant point. The machine men reached the spaceship and hurried inside.

"Our ship was in poor condition to travel," 744U-21 explained. "But we knew it would be difficult for you to get back safely even if Myrrx were successful in opening your prison, so we came."

THE SPACESHIP flew back to its old position inside the protection of its anti-airship batteries. 744U-21, the professor and other leaders of the expedition went into conference with 168P-75 and 65G-849. 168P-75 had something of momentous importance to disclose.

"I believe that at last we have solved the problem of transmitting thought direction to the robots. I have built a very powerful thought transmitter which will reach them successfully within a radius

of thirty degrees of latitude on this planet. The closer we are to them the better it will work, of course. Our own mental direction will have no effect, for their mechanical brains are fixed to the set wavelength of the Qurlgs. I have successfully directed several robots myself after adjusting their mechanical brains to the wavelength of a Zorome. Myrrx, however, is our answer. She shall do the transmitting. We are ready for our initial experiment."

"Then let the institution where Stluu is captive be the scene of the first experiment," Professor Jameson suggested. "Let us discover what happened to him."

"Perhaps the operation was a failure," 744U-21 suggested.

"In that case, we might better look for Stluu in the Garden of Death," the professor observed.

"We are in no condition to leave the planet Rm," said 20R-54, "but with a few more days of intensive work we shall be able to fly almost anywhere on this world at a fair rate of speed."

The calculations of 20R-654 proved to be accurate, and several days later the spaceship headed for the institution where the stockade of rays encircled the group of buildings. The same six Zoromes who had gone there before and were familiar with the place were ready to fly down on their mechanical wings. They hovered high above the prison-hospital while 168P-75 arranged his apparatus and Myrrx directed her thoughts at the robots below.

"Leave the buildings and the enclosure," she concentrated upon them. "Walk through the curtain of rays and stay there until I tell you to return."

They watched. Far below, they saw tiny figures of metal come out of the buildings while those already in the yard left it and walked through the rays. Those leaving the buildings milled confusedly. Some of them re-entered. A few walked out through the veil of rays.

"You seem to be having only partial success," 744U-21 told Myrrx. "But still, it is something gained."

"The Qurlgs are countermanding the order. They are directing the robots to return," 168P-75 explained. "You must keep up the fight, Myrrx, and I shall turn on more power. I know that our transmitter is more powerful than any they are using, but where a Qurlg personally directs the actions of a single robot it will be difficult. Happily, the robots outnumber the Qurlgs in such multiple numbers that opposition by the Qurlgs in this manner will have but a slight effect in the long run."

Myrrx concentrated persistently, and soon great numbers of the robots left the institution and the protection of the ray fence around the place.

"Now is the time," said Professor Jameson to his original five companions of the expedition. "Let us be off."

A door was opened, and they flew down into the yard of the prison-hospital. Only a few robots were to be seen about the buildings and these were in something of a mechanical state of confusion, victims of a mental tug of war. A vast assemblage of the robots waited patiently outside the veil of rays, however, held there by the mental control of Myrrx. A few bewildered Qurlgs were to be seen, but they fled at sight of the machine men who flashed a warning that interference with them would mean death. Straight to the old chamber of Stluu they went. The Qurlg was there, and he looked up in surprise. He failed to recognize his old friends. They saw in his mind that he looked upon them as robots, in spite of their metal wings.

"Stluu—do you remember us, or did the operation work?" the professor radiated. "Are we strangers to you?"

For a moment, Stluu seemed dumb with puzzlement. Then recognition and gladness leaped into his large eyes.

"There was no operation!" he exclaimed. "I am waiting for them to select another brain specialist. They do not expect Plabfk to recover sufficiently ever to operate again!"

"Recover?" queried the professor. "From what?"

"He lay under the light too long before they found him," said Stluu.

"Quick! Leave the place with us! Our spaceship is here this time, and we shall fly you out of here!"

"But the robots—and the Qurlgs!" Stluu protested. "They will stop us!"

"Not this time!" the professor assured him. "Myrrx will explain it all to you when we reach the ship!"

Leaving the building, the professor and 6W-438 carried the frightened Qurlg up to the door of the spaceship. Only partly recovered from his fright at the dizzying heights to which he had been carried, and breathless, his first thought was for Myrrx.

"She is standing before you," Professor Jameson told him.

Stluu stared confusedly among the cubed machine men and the few pseudo-robots grouped around him.

"Here I am, Stluu," Myrrx radiated, laying a metal hand gently on his arm. "I wanted to do this because it was the only way I could save our friends who had saved me and who tried so hard to save you. And our friends here from another world have shown me a way to do more for the cause you represent and have remained steadfast to than we might ever have hoped for in our wildest dreams."

"You have been made one of them!" cried Stluu, dazed. "A brain in a metal body!"

"I am ageless!"

"But I loved you, Myrrx!" Stluu said. "We were to lead our species away from—from what you have become—to live the normal life of flesh and blood!"

"I am sexless," Myrrx admitted. "But

which is greater to you, Stluu, your cause or your own selfish hopes?"

"Our own plans seemed the very embodiment, the noble example, of all that I preached!" Stluu protested. "But now—"

"We can go on together," Myrrx told him. "It is a greater goal to which we strive than the humble one we might have realized, and we never would have realized any of it had it not been for the intervention of our friends."

A machine man stepped forward and radiated a message to the perplexed Qurlg. "I am 119M-5, but long ago I was Princess Zora of the Zoromes and in the same predicament as you. My lover, Bext, was killed in a space war with a neighboring world to Zor. He is now a machine man and known as 12W-62, and is one of our expedition."

119M-5 reached out a tentacle and linked it with a tentacle of the machine man who walked over beside her. "Bext has been a machine man a bit longer than I. I was still a flesh and blood Zorome when I first saw him, and I was overwhelmed even as you are. We still feel a friendly regard for each other, and we always will."

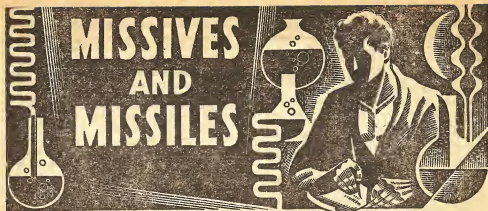
"Then my only solution is to become like you—like her?" Stluu queried.

"Would you rather grow old and die?" 12W-62 asked him. "And leave her to carry on your work alone?"

Stluu's thoughts and emotions were becoming more ordered, and he was able to see a more complete picture as the logic of 12W-62 struck home to him. The future stood in clear perspective before him.

"No," he breathed softly, his eyes on a far, visionary horizon. "Together, we shall build a new and free world and shall live on and on to guide it."

"And we shall remain on Rm long enough to help you and Myrrx establish that new and free world," Professor Jameson promised.



RESPONSES are beginning to come in to our request for an overhauling of our editorial policy—some of them pretty unflattering, too. That's what we wanted. We know we're not perfect, but that's no help unless we know exactly where, in your collective opinion, we miss fire. We'll put all the letters together in the next issue, add them up and see where they lead us.

Meanwhile, you have one scalp in your belt; the rocketship logo is gone from the cover and contents page, and the "Big Book" line with it. We think the improvement is a major one—SSS looks, now, like the kind of magazine we want it to be.

The reprint question has been a lively one in these pages. Editorially speaking, we find the pro side of the argument flattering—naturally we've had some immortal stuff of yore. The chin we stick out with Joel Townsley Rogers' "Beyond Space and Time" is yours to swing at, and should help settle the question. Most of the younger generation of s-f readers have never had a chance to read these stories, and we think a good many of the old-timers will be glad to see them again.

Dear Editor:

When so many science-fiction magazines are going overboard to fantastic realms, it is a distinct pleasure to read **SUPER SCIENCE STORIES** which at least recognizes the word "science". Perhaps the others have developed an inferiority complex in the face of the H-bomb. I don't know; but for the most part they seem to shy away towards pure fantasy. I hope SSS will continue to print "old-style" science-fiction.

In giving this opinion of the May issue,

I refrain from using your printed opinion blank for two reasons: one, it offers no opportunity to comment on individual stories and, two, it is not logical to list novels, novelettes, and short stories without some distinction between them. I don't think a straight rating of 1 to 8 can be constructively critical where such wide differences of length and intention exist, although in this particular issue novelettes and novel seem to merge. Thus to the individual stories. (The poll is weighted in favor of longer stories; but you can take that into account in reading the results.—Ed.)

Novel: **THE DEATH CRYSTAL**: Clean-cut vivid writing; well-knit plot; the technical theme is highly interesting and remains with the reader in the right proportion; in fact the whole story shrieks **FORMULA!** I am not against the use of a formula in stories (I wouldn't have so very much to read if I were) but I think that the "meat" of a story is something more. Reading **THE DEATH CRYSTAL** is like taking a pleasant sip of wine without the rewarding glow of warmth which invariably follows. Mr. Smith is definitely capable of more than just action.

Novelettes: First, **THE VANISHERS** and, second, **THE CALL FROM BEYOND**. Both stories are well-written and hold the reader's interest. There are a few points, however, which put the one above the other. In **THE VANISHERS** we are closer to home both in time and space. Science-fiction fans can usually surmount time and space without difficulty, but the possibilities of the near future on our own planet will always hold a higher interest. But this is not the main difference. In **THE CALL FROM BEYOND** we have essentially two ideas tied together in a rather

flimsy fashion. Either one, developed fully, would have made a good showing. With the two together the final effect is strained and unsatisfying. **THE VANISHERS**, on the other hand, is concerned with a simultaneous defense of the A-bomb and discovery of the new weapon against which there is no defense, leaving the world in the same position — amplified to a horrid and vivid extent—as it was before, the vicious circle idea. **THE VANISHERS** is concentrated where **THE CALL FROM BEYOND** is continually threatening to break apart. It is interesting to note the use of rigid military secrecy in both cases. One last comment on **THE CALL FROM BEYOND** which I admit is personal prejudice. It is galling to think that man's future sweep to the stars must rely upon a bottle-inspired intelligence, whether the concoction is a product of the chemist in the interests of science, or the brewers of the proverbial firewater.

Short Stories, in order of merit:

SLAVE OF ETERNITY: In this story we have the element which causes some stories to be rated high and others mediocre. It is an element that might have made **THE DEATH CRYSTAL** a better work. We are used to the idea of a last man on earth, of complete destruction, of robots, of man having eternal life. We have been more or less conditioned to think that eternal life is something to strive for, the most priceless of jewels. But in **SLAVE OF ETERNITY** we meet a situation where this dream is shattered, and eternal life an agonizing punishment. And, although we have a complete plot, when we put the story down we cannot forget it, for a seed of discomfort has been sown and we uneasily question an idea we have hitherto accepted. Is immortality something to slave for? Is it the answer to a prayer or the end of all hope? Whatever we conclude, stories like **SLAVE OF ETERNITY** have made us pause, have made us think. Mr. Dee, in **SLAVE OF ETERNITY** has given us reason to ponder, and that is the mark of a "first" story.

HOP O' MY THUMB: In the character of George Everson we have an exceedingly fine portrayal of courage and self-sacrifice. It is the most important part of the story and the midget invaders are secondary, although effectively used. The use of the "Pleasure Planet", under less important circumstances, would be more than humorous. This story is the well-done character portrayal of a noble man. It was a pleasure to read of one again.

THE LONG WAY: This might have been titled "Galactic Laboratory Experiment". It is coldly scientific and could have been warmed up by having the characters play a more important part. After all, even in science we find hopes and fears. This historical fiction of the future based upon theories of the twentieth century is highly

interesting, and could be made more so if not divorced so much from life.

GIFT OF DARKNESS: The "complex" theme has been worn to death in the last few years. **GIFT OF DARKNESS** deteriorates at the end, with the use of a "report" as concluding explanation. It is rather artificial. The title seems to be inappropriate for the story as a whole.

BY THE STARS FORGOT: This story is out of place in **SSS**. It is more suitable for the fantasy magazines. The story itself is a good satire on the ambitions of modern efficiency experts. At times it is overdone to the point of becoming hilarious. (That's bad?—Ed.)

Of the departments and features, **MISSIVES AND MISSILES** is, of course, the more important. Keep it going and make it longer, if possible. **THE SCIENCE FICTIONER** and **FANDOM'S CORNER** are interesting, to me, in that order.

The front cover is good. It's a shame story titles have to obscure part of it. How about some sort of rearrangement? For instance, a three-part division with the **SUPER SCIENCE STORIES** spaceship (minus *The Big Book of Science Fiction*) against a white rectangle at the top, the two leading story titles in a smaller but similar rectangle at the bottom, and the main cover painting occupying a "portrait" center?

I await your next issue with patience, hoping that the angry authors of the May issue will withhold their newly developed fiendish weapons until I have a chance to read it.

Sincerely,
Walter H. Mulstay
P.O. Box 421
Durham, N. H.

Thanks for a thoughtfully critical letter, Walter; the more we get of these, the better we like it.

Dear Editor:

Hlo again. Tis me, the Main-iac. Yeh. Anyway, I have here beside me the current issue of **SSS**. A whooping good issue too. I even liked George O. I usually don't.

But let's be chronological about this. Hmmm. Can't. I don't know just at which times you got which items. But to be conventional, I'll start with the cover.

I really liked it. It actually lives up to the title of the mag. Honestly. Noticed that it is a cover for a cover's sake. (Whatever that means.) But it didn't fit any story; was good; so why must a cover fit a story? (Oh, screaming demons! I'm turning on one of fandom's most sacred laws. That which says "The cover must go with a story in the magazine's contents." Tsk.)

THE DEATH CRYSTAL was good. No mo', no less.

THE CALL FROM BEYOND was by Simak. Must I say more? No? But I will. I could stand one or more stories by this master in each issue.

I don't know whether Arthur J. Burkes antedates Simak or not, because I've seen some pretty old issues of prozines with their stories, but both were right in there pitching. This one by Burks shows some influence from when he was CO of a Marine Training Center on some island (forgot the name) Nice story, even if the ending did leave one dangling a bit. A sequel mebbe? Same goes for the Simak story.

Personally, I think the short stories took the prizes this time. Even you think so according to your rating of John D's short (his first one I mean). I might agree with you there. But I think his GIFT OF DARKNESS might out-do it. Might. But at last, I know that Peter Reed is John D. MacDonald! Hooraaay!

In answer to my query in M&M some time ago, you unloosened a bit and admitted it was a pen name. I thot so. So for many eons (I mean months!), I cudged my brains. (A difficult task indeed.) Each story by Peter Reed, I read carefully, trying to find a clue in its style. While reading GIFT OF DARKNESS, there was a tantalizingly agonizing familiarity about it. Ghu how that irked me. Then recently it was revealed that Peter Reed and John Wade Farrell are Macnyns (cute, eh?). And it clicked! (The GoD story familiarity did.)

Happy as I am, I'm undergoing the same thing with "Roger Dee" now. (Relax.—Ed.) This might even overshadow the two Macstories. (I hope John D. MacDonald doesn't resent or get irked by my terminology concerning him and his works.)

Francis Ashton (.. I mustn't forget either). Gad, the same Ashton who authored BREAKING OF THE SEALS (a truly great novel of fantasy) and ALAS, THAT GREAT CITY? Anyway, this short could be authored by the same man because it too contains seeds of greatness. The only thing I didn't like about Joe's short was its title. HOP O' MY THUMB. Ghaaa. Otherwise, it was triffic.

So how do we end. All fiction good and up. Especially the shorts. Cover mucho satisfactory. Illustrations same. Columns and such ditto. All pen names present and accounted for, except that I don't know one of the three.

All I can say is, DOITAGAINDOIT-AGAIN! (Taking pity on the poor fellow who has to linotype this, I'll end here.)

Oops, one or more things: SSS is the best Pop Pub now. And IT IS MUSKAT RAMBLE, not MUSKRAT RAMBLE. Even dj's make that mistake, but unless there are two songs ... which I doubt, it's the former. Tsk on MacDonald. (Tsk

on us. We'r not hep, but we spell real good, so we changed it.—Ed.)

Sincerely,
Ed Cox
4 Spring St.
Lubec, Me.

Dear A. Nonymous,

I'd like to take exception to a statement put forward by Cliff Simak in his otherwise excellent story. "The Call from Beyond."

On P. 69, Col. 1. West blithely states that the human race doesn't kill mutants anymore—it confines them to such dead-ends of expression as Art and Music. If I may be allowed (I'm doing it anyhow) to quote from a story Bill Temple wrote for another mag, in it he asks who mankind's greatest teachers are. The answer is the world's great artists, musicians and writers (no stf. authors mentioned). Maybe I'm prejudiced as I hope someday to be a commercial artist, but I go along with Bill all the way. (Except that in his story there were Martians sent to Earth for the purpose of teaching mankind how to live side by side without hollering for H-bombs.)

It would be as artists and musicians that Cliff's mutants could make their greatest appeal to mankind, for they appeal chiefly to the emotions—and when it comes to a battle of Heart vs. Head, I'll lay my money on the heart any day. Dead-ends of expression? Hardly, Mr. Simak. . . .

Neil Graham
R.R. 4
Mitchell, Ontario
Canada.

We won't put all our dough on Head, but we think Simak was right. Although it needn't always be true, we think that the arts, right now, are "dead ends". We

OPINION TALLY

May, 1950

1. The Long Way.....3.0
2. The Death Crystal.....3.7
3. The Call From Beyond.....3.9
4. { By the Stars Forgot.....4.8
 { Slave of Eternity.....4.8
5. The Vanishers.....5.0
6. Hop O' My Thumb.....5.2
7. Gift of Darkness.....5.5

paint, ourself, so don't accuse us of saying it's not worth doing. But ask yourself what living human being has most profoundly influenced humanity, and the answer comes up Einstein. Not Picasso, not T. S. Eliot, not Hemingway and not Stravinsky. The arts are important, all right, but not crucial in the sense Simak was using. The evidence is that only in totalitarian countries, where everything is considered dangerous enough to regulate, are they subject to any restriction.

Try to do something contrary to public policy in science, in education, government or religion, and see how far you get. But in the arts you can say what you choose, and your only punishment is the kind of indifferent, unorganized ignorance that produces remarks like, "It looks like he threw an egg at the canvas." Reason? Not the democratic tradition; that goes under soon enough in any "sensitive" field. The arts just aren't that important.

Dear Missiles:

I owe S³ (for you non-mathematicians, that's SSS) an apology for the post-postscript on my first letter. I should know better than to accuse a mag like S³ of being likely to garble a letter in the process of cutting it. It wasn't cut much, either.

The best story in the May issue was the short, "Hop O' My Thumb". It had what a science-fiction story needs: a scientific principle applied in an unheard-of way. It hadn't what every science-fiction writer should steer clear of: lush descriptions of bug-eyed monsters; Morrison showed admirable restraint in his alien beings. Moreover, it had what sparks up any story: punch.

However, I am afraid that the physics is slightly wrong. Oh, yes, the planet will collapse—but not suddenly. As I read the theory, there is no critical mass for a cold body. It collapses slowly. First the electronic structure of the atoms in the interior of the body begins to break down—gradually, the outermost electrons first. Then, with increasing mass, the freely moving electrons and nuclei are gradually pushed together. There is a very great difference between a mass that can exist as ordinary matter and a mass that is heavy enough to be compressed to nuclear matter. There is no sudden collapse as a "certain maximum" is reached. Of course,

the sudden addition of a large mass might cause sufficient collapse to release enough heat to destroy life on the planet—maybe. But Morrison's is still the best story.

I'd like to bring up a rather scratchy question: what makes a good science-fiction tale? I consider the critical quality to be a new and plausible scientific or pseudo-scientific idea. The story must develop this idea. No stories for me that weave a spine-tingling detective story around standard space-story props. None of these stories like "The Vanishers", with stereotyped force-fields, teleportation, a new type of monster supposedly a scientific creation, without an attempt at a pseudo-scientific explanation. None of these bug-eyed monsters, either, stuck in so a blood-and-thunder western-type story can get into an s-f mag. Using blasters instead of six-guns is not sufficient excuse for calling a tale science-fiction.

The primary purpose of an s-f story—and get this, Ed, I'm serious—is to develop a scientific or pseudo-scientific idea. The purpose of the whole field of science-fiction is to show that the development of such an idea, and the mental gymnastics it takes for the reader to adjust to a new scientific climate, can be more entertaining than a blood and thunder, blood-froze-in-his-arteries "thriller." Any story that puts such a thriller in a scientific climate that s-f fans are already accustomed to is not legitimate science-fiction. Neither is any story that places more emphasis on blood and thunder than on the scientific idea. Check on this with the other fans, Ed; I want to know if anyone else feels as I do.

Just incidentally, I didn't like Finlay's illo for "The Call from Beyond." Are those creatures supposed to be from other worlds? Finlay has no imagination. All his fiendish beasts are slightly modified earth mammals, except the owl at the upper left of the group. Too many of the other-world creatures are decidedly humanoid. Why doesn't somebody use some other forms of life? If they can't think them up borrow from other earthly life forms. Use reptiles instead of mammals as a base. Or better still, use samples from the whole tribe of insects, arachnids, crustaceans, etc. Use an external skeleton. Use compound eyes, complex laterally-opening insect-type jaws, multiple eyes like a spider's, eyes on stalks, antennae, fuzzy wings instead of flashy or bony wings, segmented bodies, silvery scales, hairy bodies, or a host of possibilities available in the varied life on earth. I'm surprised at Finlay's lack of imagination. That's what s-f needs most—imagination.

Quite sincerely,
Martin Brilliant
Washington & Jefferson College
Washington, Pa.

(Continued on page 127)

"When terror had grown
to the ultimate, he would
drain my life forces. . . ."



THE WORD FROM THE VOID

*Tyrant of Mars . . . undying king
of space—all roads were open to
Camp—save Man's immortal right
to be—himself!*

I SHOOK my head again in an attempt
to clear it of the woji fumes. It did
little good. The ultra-sights of my
silogun were hazy, indistinct. I cursed
the Venusian Gadaboot who'd kept me up
half the preceding night buying me drinks.

By MACK REYNOLDS

I tried to concentrate, to steady my shaking hand. It was no good; I couldn't risk the shot in my present condition.

In the valley below, the Saturnian Slaber bent over Deema Tas, the Martian desert princess. Three of his eyes gloated over her delectable beauty, while the other three kept a cautious watch for enemies. Thus far, I was sure, he hadn't spotted me.

I knew his awful desire; to intensify her terror to the point where her mind was on the verge of snapping, and then to consume her life forces. In all the system—nay, in all the universe, there was no more horrible, monstrous creature than the Slaber. My own mind reeled at the danger with which my betrothed was faced.

Could I cover the half-mile distance to them in time? I doubted it.

I felt despair. And then, suddenly,

And then, suddenly, what? Ray Camp leaned back in his chair and stared at the yellow sheet of paper in his typewriter for long moments.

And then, suddenly, nothing. No more would come.

He reread the last two hundred words and grimaced. It was lousy. He looked through the empty pack absently for the tenth time, and threw it back on the desk. He patted his clothes for a stray cigarette, gave up, and finally resorted to locating the largest butt in the ashtray.

He read the two hundred words again and snorted with disgust. It was worse than lousy.

He took two quick puffs on the cigarette and ground it out again in the ashtray; tore the paper from the typewriter and threw it into an already overflowing wastepaper basket. Then he reached into an open drawer of the desk for another sheet. He rolled it quickly into the machine.

Ray Camp stared at the yellow sheet for a long time. The thought came to his

mind that he was lucky it wasn't white. He remembered the old gag about the writer who got snow-blindness from staring at a blank sheet of white paper.

Finally he said aloud, "Maybe I should take it from the girl's angle."

The typewriter started to clatter again.

Slowly I came out of the faint, merciful unconsciousness which had overwhelmed me when I first glimpsed the Saturnian Slaber. My brain reeled, but I fought to control it. I knew that I could not afford weakness now. My chances of escape were too slim; too fearfully, desperately slim.

And, too, I must remember my pride of race. For more than forty decads, the equivalent of sixty Terran millennia, the proud Deema Clan had ruled the Zeiss tribes of the Martian deserts.

In me, the Princess Deema Tas, was the last hope of the dying Zeiss. If my marriage to the Terran hero, Hari Brun, was the success our witch-scientists predicted, perhaps a new life would flow into the bloodstream of the desert tribesmen.

The Slaber crouched above me, drooling. Three of his eyes ran over my body, noting the torn madlerobe, symbol of Zeiss nobility, noting the scratches I'd suffered in my escape from the Mercurian Bouncer a scant hour ago. I knew what was in his evil mind. When my terror had grown to the ultimate, he would drain the life forces from my brain, leaving my body a mindless hulk.

Oh, where was Hari Brun?

YEAH. Where was Hari? Hari was up on the hill squinting drunkenly through the sights of his silogun, so bleary-eyed that he had a hard time making out which was Deema Tas and which was the Slaber.

Ray Camp leaned back again and grunted. He picked up the empty cigarette pack and felt around in it hopelessly. He stared at it somewhat in surprise; he thought

he'd just bought a new pack an hour or so ago. A little fishing around in the ash-tray brought to light a longish butt.

He read what he had just written and groaned. The more he looked at this story, the sorrier he was he'd ever started it. For the ten thousandth time, he wondered who in the world bought the magazines for which he was trying to wrtie.

The stale cigarette bit his tongue; he ground it out in the tray and tore the sheet from the typewriter with his left hand. He sighed and reached for another with his right.

The typewriter started to stutter again.

I bent over the Martian female. From deep inside, I could feel wave after wave of flooding desire for her life forces. It had been many koorls since my mairdeen buds had feasted. I was weak from lack of life.

But not so weak that I was unable to detect the presence of another life upon the hill behind us. I reached out with my thirteenth sense to scan it.

A Terran! Curse of the Slabers! The only life form in the system with which we were unable to cope. I muttered a quick prayer to Wodo, pledging a new altar to his sacred name if I were but successful today.

As I contemplated the fullness of the life forces in the Martian princess sprawled before me, I scanned the brain of the Terran.

Ah! Praise be to Wodo! His brain was befouled with woji. He was attempting to slay me with one of the deadly Terran siloguns, but the effects of the narcotic-alcoholic drinks were preventing him from using his sight-organs properly. Once again I praised the Gods of Saturn that we of the Slaber race needed neither food nor drink.

Almost maddening glee welled up within me. I had the time to drink of the priceless life of the princess. In mere moments,

her life forces would be part of mine. I bent over and gazed deep into her eyes. She was terrified,

Ray Camp stopped again and regarded the typewriter with disgust.

"That does it. The more I write, the lousier it gets."

He reached for his cigarette pack and noted with surprise that it was empty.

He kicked his chair back and reached for his hat. It wasn't necessary to think about it. He knew where he was going.

Ray slammed the door behind him and walked down two flights to the street. It was a beautiful day, but he didn't bother to notice. He made a beeline for the corner bar.

When he entered, the bartender, a Venusian Gadaboot, looked up from the bourt he was mixing. "Hello, Ray," it shrilled, "How are you?"

"Sober," Ray Camp grunted.

The bartender finished the drink, slid it over to the Mercurian Bouncer who had ordered it, and rang up the two credits on the cash register. He came over and leaned on the bar before the writer. "What'll it be, Ray?"

"Might as well make it woji. I've given up trying to do any work today."

The Venusian bartender mixed the drink expertly, getting in the exact three drops of Plutonian absinthe.

"You still trying to make your living writing for the magazines, Ray?" he whistled.

"Yeah."

The bartender slid the drink over to him and leaned on the bar again. "You still trying to crash those confession magazines?"

Ray Camp sipped the drink appreciatively. "Yeah. I've been trying to write a confession story all morning. If I don't make some money soon, I'm going to have to leave Mars and go back to Terra and get a job."





I shot from the atmosphere
in half a breath. . . .

—BEYOND— SPACE AND TIME

*Beyond the orbit, beyond the drift—beyond the galaxy itself
lay Helver's course—one man alone against the stars, in
the mightiest adventure the universe had ever known!*

By
**JOEL
TOWNSLEY
ROGERS**

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CHAPTER ONE

Sky Viking

WE MADE the rocket (said Gunderson) to penetrate beyond the earth's atmosphere, 'out of the sun's orbit, and out of the galaxy, if possible. The conception and the mathematical formulae were Hartley's, the details of the construction mine. It was our

purpose to explore outer space, to investigate the mystery of the cosmos, to solve the riddle of the fourth dimension, Time, and to reach that roof of heaven where, eighteen million light-years or more away according to the best available data of mathematics, infinity curves and returns upon itself in a parabolic trajectory—to find the answer to the last question, in short, and the solution of the ultimate equation. An unparalleled venture, yes. But it was time, as Hartley said, that it be done.

At no time ever before in the world's history had there existed contemporaneously two men whose capabilities and geniuses so complemented and dovetailed into each others' as did our own; and it might well happen that there would not be again two men like us for fifty thousand years, if ever.

Consider briefly who we were—Hartley, the greatest mathematician and theoretical physicist that the world has ever known, the perfect exponent of completely idealistic and abstract thought, a man beside whom Galileo was only an ignorant schoolboy and Archimedes no more than a primitive barbarian; and myself, Helver Gunderson, of Gunderson Laboratories, the developer of the make-and-break ray, of the spinning wing, the watch-type televisior, the sky pavement and the atom-engine, to speak of only a few—a man with an intellect on a far lower and humbler plane than Hartley's (I would be the last to dispute it) but still a man who at the very least has shown himself the greatest pragmatic inventor since Edison.

There we were. The combination might never happen again. Perhaps we had been put there for something by a distant Mind which had controlled our conception. If for no purpose, still we must milk the blind cow, Chance, and obtain some nourishment from the circumstance.

To probe the final mystery. There could

be no venture greater. Only the two of us knew anything about our plan and purpose, and, of course, Nivea, my wife—Hartley himself was unmarried, except to his science and his mind. We worked on the blueprints nine months together, after Hartley had brought me his calculations and equations, which had taken him ten years to produce. The actual building of the rocket was done in one of my own plants, the Gunderson Engineering Three at Bridgeport, which was specialized for experimental work of the most confidential sort and staffed with a picked corps of superskilled and loyal technicians.

Even so, we had to go carefully. Each workman, working on his individual part, did not know the purpose of the whole. It was rumored that it was a great new submarine, that it was an invention for boring towards the center of the earth, into that great core of compressed and adamantine gold on which all the continents float. I let them think as they wished to think. If they had known the real purpose of that unprecedented ship, they would have thought I was insane.

The building of it took six months, and I was with it night and day, hardly sleeping in all that time more than two hours at a stretch, and frequently neglecting to eat for days, working in an increasing tension as it neared completion. There were many problems to be met, many seemingly insuperable difficulties to be overcome. There were times when I almost despaired, when my inventive skill seemed to have run up against a blank and impenetrable wall. As if there were a hand which stood pushed out against me, and said: Thus far, and no farther!

Yet who could say that to me, Gunderson? One by one I broke down and overcame those problems, solved the last difficulty. There came the dawn when the last rivet had been driven, the last delicate instrument tested and installed, and the machine was trundled onto the cradle,

prepared for its christening and launching on the shore of the Sound in front of the factory, on—what day is this?—on May the seventh, nineteen forty-eight.

We stood there beside it on its launching platform, Hooker Hartley and I, in that stupendous moment before its take-off into the distances of ultimate space, while Nivea prepared to christen it with champagne, and the dazed and uncomprehending workmen who had trucked it forth and set it there clustered bewilderedly on the ground a hundred feet below. It was a ship capable of accomplishing the great thing that Hartley had conceived and I had planned. I knew without a doubt it was the greatest of all inventions, the most stupendously conceived, the most perfectly wrought out in every detail. I put my hand on it and stroked its welded sides as if it had been a living bird. A thing of midnight blue and silver, shaped like a great tear, ready for the stars.

"Will it do it, really?" said Hartley, standing there bareheaded with me, hunched and shivering, with his hands jammed in his topcoat pockets, staring at it with his great luminous eyes. "Beyond the orbit, Helver?"

"Beyond the orbit?" I said. "Beyond the drift! Beyond the galaxy!"

"Beyond the galaxy!" he said. "To the outergalactic void?"

"Beyond! Beyond the utmost nebula!" I said. "To the ultimate limits of space, Hooker!"

He shivered beside me on the launching platform, standing there soft, plump, and delicately boned, with his fragile hands jammed deep in his topcoat pockets, with his head pulled down between his shoulders, the black curly hair growing thin on top of the great skull above the mighty brain. His full lips were pursed together and a little twisted, with one eye half shut. His topcoat collar was pulled up around his ears, and still he shivered a little in the cold, thin dawn. The elevation

of the platform perhaps affected him. He had always been a little squeamish about heights.

And even he was awed.

"I made it," I told him. "I am Helver Gunderson. If I say that it will do it, it will do it."

PERHAPS I was a little irritated. Every nerve in my body was a hot wire. There was burning sand upon my brain. I looked down at him with my red, glaring eyes, and he seemed to shrink away from me a little. He had not really doubted me, of course. He knew that I was Helver Gunderson. He knew that if I had made it, it would do it. His question had just been a demand for reiteration of a true but astonishing fact.

"I use atomic energy for the take-off, Hooker," I explained to him more patiently. "She travels by cosmic energy after the first nine minutes, by which time we should be well beyond Mars, I think. . . ."

But he was paying no attention, I realized; he was immersed in those vaster, more splendid thoughts of his own. Shivering with pursed lips, and with one eye blinking.

"But mechanics bore you," I said a little lamely. "The point is, it will do it. It will work. Do you want to look inside?"

"What?" he said. "Oh, no. No, thanks. I'll take your word for it. I wouldn't understand it, anyway."

I felt a little baffled by him. A little humiliated and regretful that he should not find sufficiently interesting the mechanical problems which I had faced and conquered. But who was he to waste his mind on things like engines?

"To the ultimate limits of space!" he repeated, catching his breath.

He had a picture of it, I knew, in his mind. "And back," I said.

But he did not hear me. His teeth chattered, while he shivered. Suddenly he began to laugh, with the breathless,

gasping laughter which some men get in moments of intense excitement. All his formulae, all his dreams! The ship I had made that would prove them all. That picture of infinity which he could see. Shivering and laughing with tight lips, with a gasping in his throat, as if he were strangling with something deep inside him, and for his life he could not stop.

"I knew that you could make it," he gasped. "To ultimate space! My God, what a man you are!"

It rested there beside us in its lofty cradle, the great rocket, silver and midnight blue. "I christen thee *Viking!*" said Nivea in her cold, clear, ringing voice, breaking the bottle of champagne across its nose.

Nivea! The dawn light shone on her smooth brushed golden hair, upon her eyes like the sparkle of beautiful blue ice, upon her small clear-cut face, so cold and proud. She wore silver fox furs around her soft white throat. There was a bunch of violets at her slender supple waist, which no motherhood had ever spoiled. "I christen thee *Viking!*" she said, Nivea. "May you beach on the ultimate stars!"

There were only three of us there, and the uncomprehending workmen staring up from below. No newsreel men or photographers. They would not have believed it if they saw it. The dawn wind was cold. The blue Sound sparkled. The moon was a pale ghost. The remnants of the wine bottle had dropped to the ground below. Nivea turned to me with her proud eyes. I polished my goggles and put on my helmet, and I got into it, with a last handshake with Hartley and a kiss on Nivea's cheek.

"Good-by, old man!" said Hartley.

"Good-by, darling!" said Nivea. "Good luck!"

I battened down the hatch, waved a farewell through the porthole, slipped my controls a couple of times, and took off.

So it was launched without fanfare that morning (said Gunderson) the greatest invention of my career, the culmination of all my mechanical genius and adaptability, upon its course into outer space according to the formulae of Hartley.

I shall never forget—though for years I did let myself forget in Mara's arms—the sight of Nivea there upon the platform with a last wave and cry to me as my swift cruiser of galactic space took off. How many years ago! What day is this? May seventh, nineteen forty-eight—yes, of course, that must be right. It was this year, this day, and this moment, at six o'clock in the morning. The same hour as when I left. . . .

YOU WONDER (said Gunderson) why a man like me should have been interested at all in a project so theoretical, a quest so unrelated to any practical value or prospect of commercial profit, so unearthly and so abstract. You see in me no more than a super-mechanic—oh, a man with an inexplicable and unparalleled genius for machines, and with a pragmatic grasp and understanding of matter in every form which has enabled me to produce those various inventions which have changed in the course of a few years the whole aspect of man's civilization. But still only a mechanic underneath, for all of that—a big-shouldered, heavy-faced fellow, with big, broken-nailed hands a little grimy with engine oil, with low brow and unkempt hair, with dull eyes and no dreams behind them—a man with a cogwheel brain. A big apelike lout of a man for all his millions, not quick of wit or speech in any way, a man whose very handclasp is curved to the clutch of a wrench. A man who but for the accident of half a dozen incomprehensible brain-cells might be lying with his shoulder-blades on the floor of any garage draining out the oil from your car at twenty-two dollars a week. A man, at the best, whose

every purpose and accomplishment has been practical and commercially profitable, an unimaginative, hard-headed, realistic man, with his feet upon the earth, his eye to the dollar. And that is true, no doubt.

It is true, like everything else, in part. I was born to the bitterest poverty; I knew terrific toil as a boy; acute hunger was a daily and constant companion to me for the first twenty years of my life; and I have had to keep my feet on the earth, to think of profit and values and commercial utility in everything in order to climb up out of that slough which otherwise would have swallowed me.

I wanted millions, and I made them. At first, to keep away from me the specter of starvation which I had known too well. After I had married Nivea, to take care of her, to maintain for her the background of great houses, jewels, clothes, society, travel, yachts, servants that she needed and deserved—to make her ever more proud and loving of me, because of the power of money that I could shower on her.

And to such a need of money it takes a long time to reach an end. For years there had been no time for me to taste the pleasures of pure science and abstract thinking, no time for dreams. But that did not mean that the dreams were not there. I, Helver Gunderson, supermechanic, engineer, multimillionaire industrialist, Swedish wizard, cog-wheel freak, I too had my dreams. Of outer space. Of infinity. Of the vast dark blue voids which lie between the nebulae. Of adventures in those realms of pure and immaculate mathematics which lie beyond space and time, wherein Hartley's great mind ranged as mine did among my electrons and differential gears.

IT WAS the racial adventurousness of my blood, perhaps, that was aroused and stirred when Hartley first broached

his magnificent proposition to me. The Norse blood. The old seafarers who were my ancestors, driven by an unappeasable urge in their quest for the unknown. By a thing within their hearts which cried, Go on! Go on, till the last shore is reached and the world's rim.

The days of the dragon boats and the thin, frail sails and the howl and lash of the spindrift in a man's teeth and the glorious lightning wrack and the chartless seas are done. But if a man has that thing in his blood, this earth will not suffice him. And the sons of those men will be faring till the world shall end. Education, civilization—but still the call of the blood is there—and still I must always be aware of that adventure-cry. It was that thing in me, born in my blood, which no doubt was one of the impulses which drew me on.

A second, no doubt, was Nivea. For she, too, felt the great splendor of that quest. The time had come when there was no more money I could make, since taxes on increased gains would actually decrease my revenue, while what was already flowing in from royalties and contracts was more than even she could spend. So that—I was free from pressure and Nivea's future was forever secured, as far as money could do it.

The thought of that unprecedented voyage into the void, that great quest conceived by Hartley, inspired her intellect with a lofty enthusiasm such as I had never known her to show before, and she spurred me on with her cold and passionless fire.

Nivea, my wife—you know her, gentlemen. She was a Saltonstall of Boston, high-born, with a lofty mind, cold but beautiful as ice. And God knows that I loved her, humbly and worshipfully, with all the power of my soul and brain. Yes, I loved her, and wanted her respect and admiration.

She had never thought a great deal of

the inventions, you understand—those things had always seemed a little dirty and beneath her, and though she endured them because of the money they brought in, in her heart she had always despised them. Dirt and machines, test tubes and stinking chemicals, she often told me, curling the edges of her thin, fine nostrils as she drew back from me. I had only wheels in my brain, there was a stink about me which would not wash off. Who could blame her? She was so high-born, you see. She had married far beneath her, there was no secret in that. Her father had been a gentleman, he had never worked in his life. Me—me, Gunderson, the Swede, with my great awkward hands, my uncouth manners; an ignorant miner's son, born in the dirt—it could be understood how much she had sacrificed, how much she had lowered herself, by marrying me. What had I ever done to make her proud of me? But this was a project perhaps not unworthy of her, this great faring into outer space.

This was something of pure science, such as even a gentleman might be honored to attempt, and to which, if successful, sufficient honor would be attached. So to warm her cold, proud eyes, to do something great and splendidly worthy of her—that was another reason that I undertook the venture, gentlemen.

And yet beyond the Viking blood, and beyond the desire I had to glorify Nivea, there was most of all the necessity I had to carry through the quest because Hartley had brought it to me. Hartley, the greatest scientific intelligence that ever lived! In my far humbler sphere of endeavor and achievement I had always looked up to him as the man of hands must always look up, I suppose, to the man of mind. Ever since I had first known him, Hartley had been my god, since I had none other. And so he had come to me with this great conception of investigating outer space, with the formulae

which he had worked out to the ultimate decimal of perfection. He had called on me for help, had Hartley, as to an equal. And I tell you, it made me proud. Only that stupendous brain of his could have worked out the ineffable equations. And yet only these hands of mine could have made the ship.

I shall always swagger a little through the eternities of hell because of that, gentlemen. He came to me, Hooker Hartley, and he said that never before in the world's history had there been two men such as he and I, and likely there would never be again. He said it was time the thing should be done. To make a ship to fly beyond the orbit, and beyond the galaxy, if possible. And he said, "Can you, Helver?" And I said, "I can." And he said, "Will you, Helver?" And I said, "I will." And so I did.

With these hands. . .

CHAPTER TWO

The Dragon Boat

I FIRST knew Hartley (said Gunderson) in college ten years ago. I knew him, but there was no reason he should know me. Even as a sophomore he was by far the most famous man in college, the leader in everything. Not merely because of his intellect—though even then, at nineteen, he was already confounding all the professors, and had started work on his epochal thesis destroying the speculations of Einstein—but also because of the other things which he represented—Groton prep school training, Newport family, wealth, breeding, generations of gentlemen behind him. A member of the best clubs, the quarterback and captain of the football team, handsome as a faun, with dark curly hair and the tilt of his head, his amazingly attractive smile, his elegant manner of wearing clothes. He knew art, wines, clothes, literature.

The best restaurants to go to, how to order a dinner for a chorus girl and how to treat a servant.

He had everything, he knew everything, he was all the things that a man envies and wishes he might be. Picture me, on the other hand, clumsy, uncouth, badly dressed, friendless and poor. I was only Gunderson, the big, dumb, ugly Swede, taciturn and alone, who lived in a little attic room up on the fourth floor. A grind, working his way through by waiting on table, by tending furnaces and by running a shoeshine stand for the rich men's sons. I was twenty-six, too, much older than the rest, for it had taken me time to save to go to college at all.

There was nothing to recommend me. I didn't even have an overcoat to my name. My only shoes, a pair of cheap work-brogans, had holes in their soles as big as a dollar, and I remember how the fellows used to laugh behind my back as I went clumping through the Yard from class to class with the mud and water squishing between my toes, like the sound of an elephant in muck, with the rain or snow falling on me, and my big red-knuckled hands clutching my books.

I wasn't even brilliant in studies, for while I might know the answers in most courses, still I had to plug for them, and if I did one or two things with atoms in the lab that made the professors lift their brows, why, that was only a kind of trick, and no one could mistake me for an intellectual. I was just one of those queer, shabby, earnest, nondescript bugs that crawl out from behind cracks in the plaster at a big college, that don't really belong at all, and never will, whose names nobody ever knows.

I was in my back room after supper one night when the door opened, and there was Hartley. I dropped everything and stood up. I didn't know he knew I was alive. I couldn't swallow. My brain was a blank at sight of him.

"Sit down," he said easily, dropping into a chair. He looked at me through cigarette smoke. "Gunderson," he said, "you and I are the greatest minds in our class, without a question, and in all college. I suspect, in fact, that we are the greatest minds in all the world. There should be a confraternity of genius. I think we should be acquainted."

"Mr. Hartley," I managed to say—I found it was all I could do to speak. "Mr. Hartley, do not make fun of me, please. I am not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with you by anyone, nor by you at all. And you know it very well. I have no intelligence at all. Or at the best, a very slow and heavy intelligence. I have only a cog-wheel brain. Beside you, I am only a mechanic."

His bright little faun's eyes danced in approval.

"I know," he said, nodding negligently. "I know you are a grind. Still, there is something in you, Gunderson. Don't be too modest. The way you stripped that atom in lab the other day rather amused me. There's no one before who's ever done it. It was neat."

"Merely a pragmatic experiment in augmenting the molecular cohesion of air," I hastened to tell him, "to be used by planes in flight to build themselves a solid roadway under wing, and so obviate the greatest present handicap to air flight, which is the risk of falling. A mechanical invention purely, and of no theoretical scientific importance."

"There you are, damn it," said Hartley, nodding. "An invention for practical use. I can do rings around you theoretically, Gunderson. But you have a hard practicality in your mind that I lack. You can see the application, where I can see only the idea. You will be a millionaire someday, while after I've lost in the market what's left to me, I shan't know how to make an honest dime. You've got the money-making gift, Gunderson, as sure

as fate, and I'm not such a fool as not to see it. So I say there's something in you. You ought to be developed. I think that I am going to take you under my wing."

"Under your wing, Mr. Hartley?" I said.

"Socially. Bring out your better points, my boy. Teach you the art of knowing how to live and spend the money when you make it. I'll bet you don't even know what a woman is. I'll bet you never even had a drink."

"Never," I said, "Mr. Hartley."

"Don't call me Mr. Hartley, call me Hooker, Helver," he said. "We're classmates, equals, aren't we, and we're friends? Do you know what I'm going to do with you tonight?" he said thoughtfully. "I'm going to take you around to Nivea Saltonstall's party, the biggest brawl of the season. Nivea, poor girl," he said. "There's no doubt she's a living beauty. I'd marry her myself, maybe, if I was the marrying kind, or if she had the dough. But that's no dice. Her old man's Cabot Saltonstall, and he's down to his last dime. He's throwing this big party for Nivea to give her a chance to hook some guy with dough. But unfortunately, there are more beautiful gals on the market than guys with a hundred grand or so to buy them with. But it'll be a good party while it lasts. White tie, Helver. And do you have to wrap your hands around your wrists and your feet around your ankles like that?"

"I don't know how to dance, Mr. Hartley—Hooker," I told him.

"Just drape yourself around the punch-bowl and you won't have to. No one's going to want you to anyway after one look at your feet."

"But I haven't got a dress suit," I said.

"I wish I could lend you one of mine, but you couldn't get your feet into the pants," he said. "You'll simply have to rent one, Helver, shoes to silk hat. You can do it for fifteen bucks at Moe's on

Washington Street, which keeps open all night."

"Fifteen dollars to rent a suit!" I said. "I haven't got fifteen cents."

"Hell," he said, "you've got a million."

And he pulled a letter out of his pocket and tossed it to me, a little excitedly. "I saw it in the mail rack in the transept," he said. "My old man is a director of the company. I saw the envelope and thought it must be for me, and opened it without bothering particularly with the address."

I fumbled with the envelope. For the moment my fingers were too thick to feel. I unfolded the letter, with the thick bond paper shaking and crackling in my hand. It was from Algamated Air, offering me a million cash and a royalty for the rights of the flying wheel which I had developed.

"A million!" I said. "A million! I can eat whenever I want to now! I can have a three-course dinner every day!"

"And you can go to Nivea's party tonight," said Hartley heartily. "Isn't it a fortunate coincidence that my determination to take you under my social wing happened to hit at the same time as this? I was just telephoning Nivea about you. Don't be bashful. She will like you, Helver, I'm sure."

I WENT with him to Nivea's party that night and met her. Within a week we were engaged, I don't know yet how it happened. It was such a dream. I remember Hartley drank with us to our betrothal the night it happened, and how smiling he looked and contented, and Nivea's cold, proud eyes, over the rim of the wine-glass which she did not sip, drifting from him to me.

"Luck to us!" said Hartley. "Don't forget old friends, Nivea, my darling. A night beneath the moon. To you, Helver, millions, more and more."

Nivea's lips were pressed white at her wine-glass rim, and she looked from him to me and closed her eyes. Upon her shy

tears, no doubt. Women, Hartley told me are like that.

We were married in the spring, after I quit college to devote myself to business. I had conditions in history and had flunked philosophy, and even my chemistry wasn't what they were looking for, quite, so it was probably just as well. Being a married man, of course, I had to work hard, to make money to compensate for the things which she had given up.

Mr. Saltonstall, her father, kindly allowed me to advance him two hundred thousand dollars, with which he went to Paris. The climate of Paris, it seemed, had always agreed with him. And Nivea began the building of her first house. When she started buying the gold bathroom fixtures she was very happy. It was wonderful to see her so happy, when I had time to see her. I was working night and day.

The next year Hartley's father lost his money, and I sold Roadless Skyways for five million and ten percent of profits—it still pays the biggest dividends after the pocket television, which I developed in two years more and put on the market myself.

So I had been close to Hartley in his youth. I had basked humbly in the shadow of his greatness, and as he grew in fame he did not grow away from me. Nivea's home and mine was always his. It was my pride to erect the Hartley Hall of Science for him at Cambridge, the most completely equipped workshop that money could procure, with ten-thousand-dollar rugs and books and paintings, and to endow the Hartley Professorship of Physics which he accepted. When he won the Nobel prize, five years out of college, Nivea and I went with him to Stockholm to receive it. He had even allowed me to aid in a humble way in the mechanical side of the problem which had won the prize for him. He was cited for it, as you recall, for developing a technic for analyzing the unknown components of cosmic

rays. I devised the apparatus for doing it one evening in my spare time, though the idea, of course, was his. All this time, of course, he was devoting himself to his major problem, to the working out of those abstruse and perfect formulae on the curve of space and the parabolic declivity of infinity which he had set as his life work, and while I was burying my nose in the grimy business of commercial invention, he was working on those equations reducing the cosmos to the n th root, which is the theoretical ultimate conceivable by the mind of man or God. He worked on his formulae and his equations ten years. . . .

I REMEMBER the evening when he came to me with his final equations. I had been out in Chicago at Gunderson Production Five, my biggest plant, where we were turning out televisions on the belt, ironing out a few small kinks of mass production. I was very tired. Suddenly, because the night was hot and I felt lonely, and the making of money alone cannot altogether suffice for a man, and because I had not seen Nivea for two months, I decided to come home to her. I hopped my plane, took Skyway Route 3 all the way, with the road mostly clear of traffic and no red lights at that hour, and arrived home at the house on Long Island in an hour and a half.

A butler met me at the door. "Madame has a guest," he said, "and cannot be disturbed. If you would tell me what it is you wish . . ."

"You fool!" I said. "I am your master! And I don't like you, nor your smug smirking face!" And I pushed him away from me like a sack of wheat, and I went leaping up the great marble stairs three at a time, calling "Nivea! Nivea!" Below me the butler was bleating, "It's Gunderson!" as if I had come to burn the house down, or where some kind of crazy tiger.

I remembered the shadowy, fox-footed

servants running in the halls, and I called to them, "Which is madam's room? Show me madam's room!" But they would not answer. It was a new house, new servants.

There were always new houses, there were always servants like weasels. But this night they seemed to me, perhaps because I was red-eyed and tired, more and more. And I was sick of new houses. I was sick of servants. I wanted Nivea. To kiss her hand, to throw myself on my knees before her. Nivea, my wife.

"Nivea! Nivea! Show me her bedroom. I'm Gunderson, your master! Where is she? What's going on here?"

Then I saw one face that I knew. It was Nivea's personal maid, Jeanne. She was standing with her back to a door, with her arms stretched out in a cross, and her mustache was trembling with her breathing and her lips were gray and her eyes were locked with terror.

"*Non! Non!*" she said, "*Mais non!* Madame is sick! M'sieu' must not go in!"

But I was in a frenzy of terror by then. I thought she might be dying. I took Jeanne by the shoulder and hurled her to the opposite wall. I lunged against the door, and it was locked. I lunged again, and it burst in before me.

"Nivea!"

But it was Hartley in the room. He stared at me as I came bursting in. He had a highball glass in his hand, and his hand shook a little, spilling it down on the soft bulge of his waist, as he stared at me numbly.

"Helver!" he said heartily after a moment, while his face creased in a plump and happy smile. "Just the man I wanted to see!"

I slapped him on the back, and asked about his health. He seemed a little pale, and there was a clammy sweat upon his forehead. But he gulped his highball down, and the color came back into his cheeks.

"What are you doing here?" I said. "I wanted you to join me in Chicago. I thought you were in Cambridge, working. What's the news?"

"I've finished the formulae!" he said. "I couldn't wait to tell you. I thought you might come home."

"Clairvoyance!" I told him with warm admiration. "What a mind you have! Even I didn't have an idea that I'd be back until two hours ago. Perhaps I heard you calling me, old friend. Where's Nivea, have you seen her?"

"Oh, yes, at dinner."

"Where is she now?"

I looked around the room. I saw some of her things upon the bureau. Some of her frocks at the edge of the closet door, which had been closed upon them. She had given him her own room, then. She must have moved to some other. There were so many.

"Where is she?" I said.

But he didn't hear me, or at least paid no attention, he was so excited with his great success.

"The formulae, Helver!" he repeated. "I have finished them! Don't you want to look them over?"

"What formulae?" I said.

Stupidly, for the instant I had forgot. "What formulae?" I repeated, a little harshly, a little nerveworn and tired.

He drew back from me. "You know, the space-time formulae that I have been working on for ten years! The thing that you built the Hall of Science for me for, and established the professorship for!"

"You've finished them at last?"

"I thought that would knock your eye out!" he said, with a pleased, quiet laugh. "Sit down, and look them over."

He poured me a stiff drink. I sat down and looked at them. My mind was tired. I was a little slow. I could not concentrate. Figures and graphs.

"What do they mean?" I said.

"They mean the way is ready!" he said.
"For the great adventure, Helver!"

I drank the whisky, and the warmth seeped through my blood. I heard far off the singing of the spheres. The great blue voids called to me with a song of winds. Beyond the orbit, beyond the drift, beyond the galaxy! And my heart lifted in my breast, it sang, and I clenched and unclenched my hands.

"What a dream!" I said.

And Nivea was there. I don't know where she came from, but she was there on the floor at my feet. With her smooth golden hair about her shoulders, her supple, slender form in her silk gown.

"Oh, Helver," she said, stroking my knee. "How proud I would be of you! Unknown shores to conquer!"

"The unknown sea!" I said.

I stroked her head. But there was no feeling in me. Neither a feeling of heat nor cold. My head was back, my heart roared in my breast, and there was a great calm within my spirit. I heard the calling of the spheres and the singing of the sea.

"Let's launch the dragon boat!" I said.
"Why are we sitting here? Let's get it launched and go! Do we want to rot and grow fat on the dull and deadly shore, when there is a wind upon the sea? Do we want to live forever to stroke a woman's golden hair, and grub like slaves for the soft pap we eat? To rot and die while still alive! Let's launch the dragon boat, by God, and we'll put out to sea!"

I held my glass out, and Hartley filled it.

I stood up. I took my hand from Nivea. The drink was strong and deep and good. "Let's go!" I said, crashing down the glass. "The unknown sea! The lightning wrack and the world's rim! Forever and forever. Beyond the gates of Hercules lies Italy! Beyond the sunset sea lie golden sands and copper women, and things such as no man has felt or seen! Get out the dragon boat!" I said. "We're heading out to sea!"

And Nivea was laughing and choking and gasping. Laughing with pride for the glory of me.

"My Viking!" she said.

"Can you make the ship, Helver?" said Hartley, looking at me with his great luminous eyes.

"Can I make the ship?" I said.

"Do you dare do it?" said Hartley.

"Do I dare!" I said.

"What a man you are!" he said.

"What a man I am!" I said. "To the roof of the world, and back! Let's go!" I said. "Why are we rotting here, when we hear the calling of the sea?"

SO WE worked together on the blueprints. Many months. Hartley remained installed in the house, to lend me any theoretical advice, as needed. I was at the shops much still, for I had a million men to feed, men and their families depending on me, and I could not leave things just at loose ends for my own selfish quest. But I gave every moment that I could to going over the plans with Hartley on Sundays and nights when I could get home.

There came this day when the ship was launched. I remember the day well. By the shore of the blue salt water, in the dawn, the great ship that I had made, all midnight blue and silver, standing in its cradle with its bow pointed to the faded stars.

"I christen thee *Viking*!" said Nivea. And I shook hands with Hartley, I kissed Nivea upon her cold proud cheek, I got into the hatchway of the ship.

"Have you forgotten anything, old man?" said Hartley.

"If I have, I have my hands."

"The wrench to tighten your inside lugs and batten down your hatch?"

"I have that, all right," I said.

"Oh, Helver!" said Nivea.

For the moment her cold, controlled voice seemed to break. Perhaps she was

remembering many things, the clumsy, awkward youngster whom Hartley had brought to her party many years before, in the cheap rented dress suit, loutish and inarticulate, and his eyes which had lit with a humble and eternal flame at sight of her. Perhaps that boy upon his knees, kissing her hand and the hem of her skirt when she said she would be his wife.

And the inventions, the conquests he had brought her, eager to have her know about them first of all, hungry for her praise. The fame and money, the millions rolling in, his clumsy hands fumbling with her hair. Perhaps she remembered that, and many things. The boy, the man, the work, the dreams, the years.

I shall never really know.

And for the moment her voice had seemed to break. But she got control of it. She smiled at me with a brave, warm smile, the warmest from her that I had ever known. Oh, but I wished in that moment with a blind and frustrate longing that I had had sons by her, to grow to strong manhood during the years when I should be gone. To find them waiting on the shore when I came back, sons of her body, and of the Viking blood. To throw their arms about me and cling to me with pride, when I came back from the ultimate sea.

But that was not to be, and never in this life to be.

Still, her smile was on me warm, the warmest I had ever known. And I knew that nothing I had ever done before for her had so pleased her as this. Nor anything, in her eyes, was so becoming for me.

"Good luck! Don't forget to come back, Helver!" she said with her warm smile, almost gaily.

"Nor that," I said.

I could see her pride and happiness shining in her eyes, and her cold face seemed suddenly warm, intoxicated,

I closed the hatch, and tightened the lugs. I saw her through the thick glass porthole, clasping the arm of Hartley beneath the armpit, drawing him close to her, as I settled to the controls. The dawn sun shone on her smooth gold hair. Her eyes like the blue of inmost fire, the passionless fire of ice.

And the wind stirred Hartley's dark curly hair. It had grown a little thin, I saw. He was a little plump. The soft years had put it on him. In that moment, somehow, I do not know why it was, he looked no more to me than a fat and greasy worm, a man with pouchy eyes too young, a soft and squashy thing, with a great hollow skull in which no more than empty formulae rattled, and greedy eyes—Hartley, the greatest brain that ever lived! Oh, it was only the distortion of the thick glass which made him seem so, made seemingly malevolent and vile the smile that was painted on Nivea's cold face.

They smiled at me. His arm was around Nivea, supporting her, there on the lofty platform beside me, and she blew a kiss at me, and waved. She shouted something, but I could not hear.

There was no need of prolonging it. I pushed the firing studs, and I zoomed off. Beyond the orbit, beyond the drift, beyond the limits of the galaxy! Towards the universe's end, if possible! Towards the answer to the last question, and the sealed books of God.

Upon that unknown sea. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Minus Time

I TURNED around in the take-off instant (said Gunderson) to wave farewell in my last glimpse of Earth, at them on the high launching platform, the men upon the ground, the chimney stacks, the blue waters of the Sound. I turned, but before I had got my eyes focused, the

whole Earth was no more than a fading planet far down the sparkling steel-blue sky. I had shot from the atmosphere in half a breath. In five minutes I was beyond the moon. Her speed increased as she caught the cosmic rays, which began to beat upon her hull like hail. Mars went whipping past like a great red ball of fire.

In two hours I was shooting past the high frozen mountains of Neptune, and the sun, far down within the wheeling sky at the center of the orbit, was no bigger than the largest star, blue as a diamond. In the bright blue light of outer space the other suns went hurtling past. We gathered speed.

The parsecs passed like clicking telegraph poles, and each one of them was nineteen trillion miles. Before noon I was streaking upward past the Pleiades, and well upon my way. As night fell, Betelgeuse, hotter and bigger than ten thousand suns, was dropping like a pumpkin seed far down the sky. I set the controls, and slept. It was noon when I woke up. I had slept the clock around, and more, after those exhausting months of sleepless strain. A sleep so long and deep that I sang in every bone, and there was a great restfulness in my soul. Still the weather had grown stormy, and the rocket was pitching in great waves as she sped. My wristwatch was stopping, as though time itself were growing motionless. There was not a star around. We had passed clear from the galaxy, the Milky Way was only a thin spot of smoke far down the sky, and in the terrific emptiness of intergalactic space a hurricane was blowing up.

The ion spray leaped against my port-hole with a gleam like St. Elmo's fire. I saw the crests of great white billows rushing, and they were nebulae. The wind howled in the eternal void, I felt the battering and straining of my hull-plates, lightning went flashing past, and we were caught in the grip of a terrific current.

And so, with controls locked in both fists and my eyes ahead, I shot toward the dimensionless point where space and time come to an end in nothingness, and reverse in minus quantity.

There is this about space and time (explained Gunderson, making a gesture carefully with his great, heavy hands), that they are shaped like a pair of inverted cones, lying point to point. They are not illimitable and all plus, as the astronomers think, with distance piled on distance, and time on time. Nor are they curved, like the inside of an egg, returning on themselves in a parabola, according to the concept of the mathematicians.

In whatever direction a man goes, they narrow to a point at the end of the cone, and beyond that there is an inverted cone of minus space and minus time, and time moves backward from its end to its beginning. You understand. That is the secret of eternity. Once explained, it is quite obvious, and even a child could grasp it. Whereas, that is, upon this Earth, within this cone of plus and forward and outside-out, time moves forward from the past into the future, and dimensions move outward from the center into the infinite, beyond the end of the cone it is all just the other way. That is the reason for the stars which seem millions of lightyears away.

They are old and are going backward to their beginnings, and by the measure of their seeming distance they are near. It is obvious and a simple thing, yet there is no man who had understood this before me. I passed this point, I shot forward into minus space and minus time. The speed went out of my ship with geometric deceleration, in ratio as it had gathered. I landed on the other Earth, which is called Threa.

There is only one other Earth, and from here to there is the distance from plus to minus, and no more. It is an Earth that once was old, and now is growing young.

The people there are like frozen flame. There I met Aevin.

(He paused, Gunderson.) She was like nothing ever dreamed of, a soul of light, a body of fire. Growing younger and lovelier hour by hour. What is there to say of her that you could understand? All that men upon this earth do not yet know. Behind her the million years of the race's future, of wisdom, beauty, and love. Ahead of her the simplicity, the loveliness of the child. With her I dreamed the golden years away.

With her, and with the seven strong sons she bore me! Those sons which upon this earth I shall never have. I can see them yet. I can feel their arms about my neck. I can hear their valiant young voices shouting and laughing even now in my ear, running about at their play—Nevs, Lrac, Cire, Fiel, Sral, Rednug, and Ollor, my sons! My strong Viking sons of flame, upon that Earth, with Aevin! I can hear them calling yet! The golden years going backward into youth! Life, love, peace, strength, and beauty! Threa, the other Earth! Beyond the cone. Within the reverse of the future. Ah, Aevin! I lived with her fourteen years on Threa. My eldest son was just thirteen, the littlest one was toddling at my knee.

But you would not understand. What is there to say? One day she took me with her to look through the telescope, which looks into the future, which is their past. I turned it on the Earth. I saw Nivea in the arms of Hartley, beside the cradle where their youngest child lay. I got into my ship, and I came back. . . .

I shot back through minus space and minus time, and the years I had spent had been less than nothing, and through the telescope which I had mounted on my bow I watched the years upon the earth roll back like a swift film, as I sped toward it, swifter than light.

I was entering the galaxy when I saw them laughing, drinking in the bed-

chamber, and it was but the morning of tomorrow. I was passing the Pleiades when I saw them at the bedroom door, and—as I sped toward them—going backward from it, and backward outward from the house, and it was but the evening of today.

And as I shot onward, through the hours, they went backward, backward, back through the afternoon and back through lunch, and back into the morning. And then there was dawn light around me, and the small blue sun was there ahead, and I was passing Neptune, and I was in the orbit once again. And they were back there by the Sound's shore, they were back there on the high platform beside the great empty cradle of my rocket, still watching, clasped in each other's arms, while their eyes focused on me while I shot off into space. Still watching, with the greed and hope and old evil, treacherous lust within their faces, she with her warm look beside him that had never warmed for me, he with his sly, fat lips and greasy, greedy eyes. They were there, watching me far off.

I landed, and they were standing there, just waving me good-by through the port-hole, and Nivea shouting some word that I could not hear. And the golden, golden years had rolled backward and away.

I TOOK the wrench and undid the hatch's lugs, and I rose up through the hatch door, tired, tired. . . .

"Don't forget to come back, Helver, darling!" said Nivea.

But there was a blank unearthly terror in her eyes, as if she had suddenly awakened from a dream that had rolled away.

"I haven't," I said, "my darling."

"You haven't forgotten your wrench, have you old man?" said Hartley.

"Nor that!" I said.

And his face, too, was fixed with terror, as if he, too, had dreamed a dream.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said.

I got out upon the platform, with my red eyes and my great hands. Oh, she was beginning to moan softly with terror, then, deep in her white throat. And Hartley's knees were like jelly beneath him, and his breath was wheezing in his windpipe, and the veins throbbed on his great, smooth thin-haired skull, and the dawn wind blew cold, and high up there, and his face was a green and moldy paste.

"I've been," I said. "I came back."

"Don't! Don't!" he screamed. "In God's name, Helver!"

He backed toward the edge of the high platform with his arms swinging and the terror in his face. But I lifted the wrench in my great hand, and I crushed in his eggshell skull with it. I crushed it in, like rotten pulp, the greatest brain that ever lived.

And Nivea was screaming, she was screaming, upon her knees there at my feet. She had always loved me, she was screaming to me. She would bear me sons, she would forever love me, she would be always true. But I strangled her with my two hands, and with her golden hair about her soft white throat.

What day is this? May seventh, nineteen forty-eight? Yes, yes, that is right. The golden years that have rolled away! It is six o'clock in the morning. That is Dr. Hooker Hartley, the eminent physician, gentlemen, lying there. That is Nivea, my wife. . . .

He paused, Gunderson, rubbing his red eyes with his hands.

"Take him away!" said the police sergeant grimly. "He is utterly insane!"

But Gunderson did not hear the grim-faced trooper. Still in his ears was the great roaring of the spheres.

REPORT OF SERGEANT J. K. BILLINGS,
FLYING TROOP G.,

CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE,

MAY 7, 1948:

WHILE flying on the traffic patrol Skyway 1A, between Bridgeport and Norfolk, at altitude 1000 feet, today at six A.M., Sergeant Billings observed a large crowd of several hundred men on the ground in front of the Gunderson Plant, Engineering Three, on the shore between Bridgeport and Fairfield, and a high towerlike structure built of new planking on which there rested, in a cradle, a large torpedo-shaped device.

Looking down, Billings observed three figures, two men and a woman, on a platform at the top of the tower beside the torpedo-shaped device, which apparently was undergoing some kind of a christening ceremony. As Billings cut his skyway pavement from beneath him and spiraled down, he saw one of the men get into the hatchway of the torpedo.

A cloud passed over the sun in that instant. Or at least for the instant, as near as Billings could describe it, he was struck with an attack of vertigo, and a momentary lapse of the time sense. He had a feeling as if a streak of gray and invisible lightning had shot back off his bow, up from the earth, and in the same instant as if it had shot back again.

He wishes to mention this in reference to his request for sick leave with pay which has lain untouched on the lieutenant's desk for the past month, as proof that the complaint of overwork which he therein respectfully alleges was not just a stall, but medically sound and legitimate,

Anyway, this time, fortunately, Billings' attack of vertigo was of short duration, lasting approximately one hundredth of a second, as near as he could estimate, or about the time of two lightning streaks. He shook his head, and his vision cleared. Looking down, he saw the man who had climbed into the torpedo climb out of it again, with a wrench in his hand, and suddenly attack the other man upon the platform. Forcing said victim of his assault to the edge of the platform, he

struck him on the head with violent force, causing said victim to fall off. Immediately, he attacked the woman who was fighting and screaming for her life.

* The crowd of mechanics were swarming up the stairs to the platform. Billings spiraled down to a landing. He mounted to the platform, and found the mechanics already there surrounding the attacker.

This man identified himself, and was identified by them, as Helver Gunderson, the millionaire inventor. Gunderson was crouched on the floor of the platform beside the body of the woman, who was identified as his wife, and at Billings' demand he made a long and rambling statement in which there was no sense, except a confession that he had attacked and killed Dr. Hooker Hartley and likewise said wife of his.

To an inquiry as to whether he regretted his act he did not reply. Billings took Gunderson into custody with the help of a squad of troopers.

From various witnesses, whose names are appended, Billings obtained the following general information. That Mr. Gunderson had shown some signs of mental strain and aberration for the past several months, working on the production of a device whose purpose they did not know, and which he kept to himself with more than usual taciturnity. That this morning Dr. Hartley, who had been summoned by Dr. Gunderson, together with Mrs. Gunderson, to come down to the plant, as the work was finished, informed various of the employees privately that Gunderson had delusions that he had made a space rocket, and he, Hartley, was afraid for his sanity.

He was merely going through with it, said Dr. Hartley, to humor Gunderson.

Moreover, while on the platform at the purported launching of the ship Dr. Hartley was seen to make various gestures behind Gunderson's back whenever he had the opportunity, such as tapping his

skull, spinning his hand around his ear, winking to the men below, and so on, emphasizing his sad conviction that Gunderson was insane. The men said that Mrs. Gunderson, likewise, seemed convinced of her husband's insanity, and was laughing constantly and hysterically almost all through the performance. However, she did not care for her husband, having been in love with Hartley.

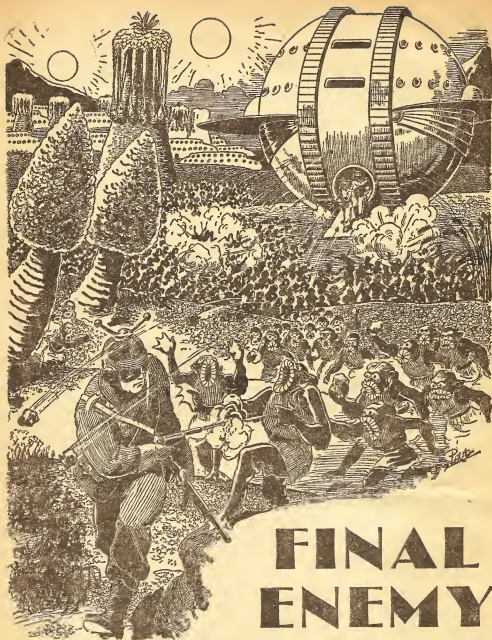
The question as to whether Gunderson deliberately plotted and carefully planned an alibi of insanity, preliminary to murdering Dr. Hartley and Mrs. Gunderson as Koliawsky intimates, is for the courts to determine.

It is the opinion of Sergeant Billings, however, that he is as bughouse as they come. He was whimpering and weeping for someone called Aevin when we took him away, and talking about his sons, when the men tell me he is childless.

Billings set a guard over the rocket before taking Gunderson away. The men insisted that they had hauled it out of the shop only this dawn, new and fresh with paint. But they must be wrong in that, since its paint, Billings observed, had an old, weathered look as it had been exposed to the elements for many years, and there were streaks upon it of a grayish powder which burned Billings when he touched them.

When Gunderson was asked as to what they were, in the hope that he might be induced to make some final and more coherent statement, he only said that they were star dust, and the spume of the Milky way.

In view of the attack of vertigo and the simultaneous gray lightning flashes going and coming which Billings was subjected to, he respectfully repeats his request for leave, for otherwise he feels that some of the rambling and incoherent things which Gunderson told to him this morning might start him off, too, looking for this land called Threa. . . .



"Ha says they were very mad. . ."

What was the terrible shadow man could not escape to the outermost universe—whose monstrous hunger made him master of his own damnation?

FINAL ENEMY

By L. RON HUBBARD

ALL THESE extra-terrestrial races were more or less of a kind, Captain Bristol thought. They might crawl over rocks like snails or fly like birds, but their culture was definitely

limited by their low intelligence. Of the fifty races so far discovered, on half a thousand explored planets, man's superiority was so strikingly manifested that an explorer was a pessimist indeed who did not expect to be welcomed as a god. The past hundred-odd years of painful and slow exploration had added much to man's knowledge. But it had not added intelligence of beings in the universe which were superior to himself.

The Aloyts were an immediate fair example. They were humonoids, with a vocabulary of around a thousand words and a culture inferior to man's stone age. They sat on the ground now, their greased sucker-like faces shiny in the firelight. They were decked out in childish robes. They held forth with absurd dignity on matters of no importance, which Captain Bristol and his officers of the *Argonaut VI* found boring.

Captain Bristol was a level-headed, gray-eyed young American brought up and trained to his trade. He had seen half a hundred worlds and was not easily astonished. Therefore when Sam Catsby, whose startling facility in language qualified him as Captain Bristol's interpreter, nudged him earnestly, the captain broke from his doze expecting to find some marauding beast upon them. Hand to weapon, he glared about him, only to be nudged again, and harder.

"Captain," said Sam Catsby in a whisper, "hear that!"

"Hear what?" said Bristol irritably. "I can't understand ten words of this yammer. And I don't care to know five words of it. This planet is a dis—"

"He's saying that they've been attacked by men before! That they want to be at peace with us. That they are scared that the other race will come back and poison them again."

"What's this?" said Bristol. "On this planet?" He nudged Godolphin, his second in command. "Hear this, Ralph."

From some other planet," said Sam Catsby. "He's saying that a long, long time ago, they were invaded by superior beings, smaller than us but madder."

"Oh-ho!" said Godolphin. "Been wondering how far out we'd have to go to run into this. I always said that it wasn't likely that man was the only civilized race in the universe. If—"

"Sam, get him to stop that confounded speech and answer some questions to the point. *When* was this?"

Sam Catsby stood up, his black face shining in the firelight, hand upraised courteously to halt the harangue of the Aloyt leader. That worthy stopped, leaning with impressive dignity on his tall, flower-decked cane.

"When did he see these people?" said Bristol.

Sam put the question. "He says maybe during his great-grandfather's time. That's probably about seventy-five years ago. He never saw them himself."

Bristol was tense now. This was something more important than a planet. If a superior race existed—and if it had already conquered space, a clash was almost inevitable, should it prove that Earth's zone of influence touched on it.

Sam Catsby's questioning was long and earnest now. And the chief's replies were long and timid, as though the memory frightened him. Finally Catsby turned to the captain.

"He says they had a round ship, not like ours. Their suits weren't made of metal cloth but were like animal skins. Maybe they weren't suits at all.

"He says his own people were very numerous then and lived all over the planet. They had some cities which the jungle has covered up; and they could do a lot of things that they can't do any more. From what I gather, he says that once they had metal knives and chest protectors. But after that invasion they couldn't make 'em any more."

"Lost their know-how," said Godolphin.

"Go on," said Bristol, eagerly.

Catsby put several more questions to the chief and then said, "They had eyes as big as the palm of your hand, black all the way across. And each man had feelers, if you call them men. They carried little sticks and whenever they pointed them at anybody he got awfully sick. A few days later he died."

"Hand radioactive weapons," said Godolphin. "Good God, we haven't even got them yet."

"He says they were very mad. They came down outside a city and they picked up several of the people; and when some of the other people came out of the city, the invaders made a thunderstorm and it killed hundreds. He says his grandfather was part of the crowd. They rushed the invaders and drove them back to their ship. But they didn't know the importance of these little sticks."

When Catsby had questioned further he turned to the captain. "He says they cut off one member of the party by throwing stones, but the rest of them got away and took off. It must have been just a scouting

expedition, because there weren't ten men in the whole outfit. This member they stoned was still alive and they dragged him up to a cave they used for their religion. They took all of his weapons away from him before he came to."

"The say that when he finally came around thirty of them tried to hold him down and couldn't make the grade. He killed a round dozen of them and the rest got away. They barricaded the door with stones and then they spent four or five days walling it up further. But by this time a lot of them had started to get sick."

"Ask him if he knows the symptoms," said Bristol.

Catsby at length nodded and while the Aloyt waited across the fire, he relayed the information to Bristol. "He says some blotches broke out wherever the little stick had been pointed and the people just died. But they'd sent this stick around as a curiosity and everybody in all the cities on this continent had seen it. And this is the only big continent on the planet. Everybody got sick. Pretty soon there weren't enough people left to keep the jungle out of the cities. He says maybe



ON THE NEWSSTANDS NOW! POLARIS AND THE GODDESS GLORIAN

By Charles B. Stilson



Not yet in the stars of Polaris was there charted a homeward voyage, as he had thought when the cruiser *Minnetonka* sailed away from mystic Sardanes. For there beckoned from the waves a weird Golden Man, calling the intrepid son of the snows from his first chosen course, to an incredibly ancient country, and into the strange thralldom of a woman—or was she goddess?—Glorian of Ruthar. . . .

This great novel by the author of "Polaris—of the Snows" and "Minos of Sardanes" is now on the newsstands in the September issue.



four or five million people died in all."

Godolphin and Bristol looked at each other. Bristol was a little white.

As soon as he was sure that he could get no more information about the actual landing, Bristol demanded to know where the cave was that had been walled in. The old chief consulted lengthily with many people around the fire. But after half an hour, he admitted that no one present knew.

Bristol turned to Godolphin. "Ralph, take ten men and go find out what you can about that cave. Open it up if and when you find it, and give me the results. I don't think you've got much chance of finding it. Although this is a pretty slim hope, I am sending back the *Supply* to report. If we're on the rim of some other superior race, Earth may need every minute she can get. A hand radioactive weapon could knock us all apart before we had a chance to get started. And we'd find our planet in the same condition that this continent got into, with everybody dead. Go get what facts you can and meet me back at the ship when you think all chances have been exhausted for further details or when you find that cave."

GODOLPHIN picked up his volunteers and Bristol wrote his dispatches. Before dawn the *Supply* scorched atmosphere and started on her three-month trip Earthward. There followed an uneasy and toilsome time for the expedition. Captain Bristol, with a small party, ransacked every range of hills he could find in the vicinities of the buried cities. His archeologists were fascinated by the deterioration of culture shown by mighty walls and towers. And his botanists would have lingered over strange flora. Bristol would give them no time.

"Everything depends on the first advantage," he said. "If we can just find that being that they walled up, he may

have on him some astronomical clue as to the location of his system. It has been a standing order for the last half-century to follow up any such lead as this. So far as I know, this is the first lead ever discovered. So forget about these towns." And he would turn them back to the thankless task of unwalling ancient burial caves by the score, wherein the dehydrated remains of Aloyts sat in mummified majesty. But they did not discover that will-of-the-wisp, the invader.

At the end of six months, the *Decatur XII* of the U. S. Navy landed at Bristol's base with urgent orders. Vice-Admiral Blanding, one of the leading space officers of Earth, inquired eagerly into the case and was even more intrigued than Bristol.

"You know what this means, captain," said Blanding. "We've got the jump on them—or will have. The Asian findings—"

"Asian?" said Bristol. "Are the Asians around here with us?" And he scanned the landscape in perplexity.

"No, no!" said Blanding. "Exactly two weeks after we got your dispatches about your find, an Asian exploration party located on Arachne precisely the same information. The people there had been jumped and slaughtered by some strange-looking beings shortly before the aliens landed here, about seventy-five years ago. Some race, with space travel, conducted a survey into our star area about seventy-five years ago. By just plain dumb luck, Earth escaped discovery. We wouldn't have stood a chance. We've confederated with the Asians—"

"No!" said Bristol.

"It's the truth! Why, man, you don't realize! When your report reached Earth's population, they surged around and demanded to know what was being done about it. When the Asians found what the natives said had happened on Arachne, Earth was knocked apart with riots. Plain panic!"

"But you mentioned a confederation—"

"Why, yes. Good lord, man, you've really been out of it, haven't you? And yet you started it. Well, in brief, all that would stop the riots was a terrific program of prevention. The nations of Earth formed up a central council and began to combine their know-how. Up to then nobody knew what anybody else was doing about space technique and weapons. We combined not only our science and forces, we combined our governments. We're all combined up and we're putting out an effort which would stagger you. New weapons. New research. New space navies. And all this end of the galaxy is being scanned for more news. This planet and Arachne are the only two we've found so far where the invaders landed."

"I've been doing all I could," began Bristol, defensively.

"No, no! You're important. You're more important than I. They want you back there on that council. I'm up here as your relief. They want to know everything and you're the man to tell them. We'll lick this problem, Captain, or perish trying. With a little time, we'll be able to knock any potential invader into the middle of the next galaxy before he knows what hits him. We'll even invade their home planet if we have to. And we probably should because every evidence indicates that those guys are killers! Well now, you know the story. Get your kit and jump into the ship. I've got my hands on things here and if your entombed invader can be found, be certain we'll find him. Cheerio and bon voyage. You'll find a mighty changed Earth but you'll like it!"

And the admiral went swinging away to get onto his job. Bristol stood, stunned and blinking. Asia and the West confederated. All the nations of Earth in common government.

He abandoned his kit, except for a picture of his wife and the presentation sword he'd gotten when he left the academy, and swung aboard the destroyer.

"Shove off!" shouted Captain Bristol.

HE HAD been used to the more plodding sort of vessel which had been build for capacity rather than speed and armament, and he found himself a little dazed at the way they passed comets. They retraced in twenty days what had taken him three hard months to cover the year before.

Bristol landed amid a sea of upturned white faces. Behind a motorcycle escort he was immediately taken to a meeting of the joint defense council, which had convened precipitately. Bristol was courteously given a seat at the lower end of the board and sat there blinking at beautiful uniforms and well-tailored clothes.

He was somewhat amazed to discover that he was not the first order of business. The Council of Nations which had been conducting the affairs of Earth was assembled here in force. And the first order of business was one which had evidently left over from previous afternoon. It had to do with the pooling of space warships.

They turned to him at last.

Captain Bristol stood, battered by the intense interest of the board.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I trust I have not sent you any capricious data. Actually my evidence is slender and our searches have revealed nothing of interest other than continued confirmation of the story all over the planet. However, some of the data I have managed to extract from the natives there—and a very sub-order of humanoid they are—has been prepared into this report."

He read to them for some minutes, his voice penetrating a deeply interested silence. When he had finished he answered their questions. And then he made his final statement:

"We have very slender data here. Even this weapon they talk about is at best poorly described. But if you think the menace—"

"Captain Bristol," said the council president, "we have every reason to suppose you are on the right track. The Asian report came shortly after yours and told of similar men in similar ships who wiped out thirty-five million people on Arachne by, it seems, bacteriological warfare. In this case the invader used a spray of some sort. While no relic of the visit has yet been found, the Asians are investigating every last scrap of evidence. Additionally we have located some vague rumors on other far planets. Out there—" He swept a hand at the huge star chart on the back wall. It was studded with tiny lights which showed where exploration parties were and small flags which showed where they had been—"out there we'll get an answer. If we make a contact, we will be advised ahead of time. And we'll be armed and ready." Thank you, Captain Bristol."

In the days which followed, Bristol was in the middle of a maelstrom of activity. He found himself teamed with an Asian, Gletkin, whose experiences on the behalf of the Asian government ranked him with Bristol as a fund of information.

The two of them, with a Swede named Pederson, made up a board of advice. They were whisked over the face of their world by the fastest and safest means available, giving judgment on structures, equipment, man-preservation in space and astrography.

Daily bulletins were issued over the world, giving news from various expeditions. The big star chart in the council chambers, matched in almost every home by an identical paper map, told the graphic story of search, search, search, nul, nul, nul.

Weapon-making changed radically. Pocket flame throwers, cuff-button bombs, two-pound cannon which would throw a million foot-pound force behind a projectile—Military organizations died as an evolved science and became a dynamic, planned operation. And more: all the

nationalities of Earth were recruited into specialized units, taught a common fighting tongue.

"Lord," said Bristol, "if this is all for naught and we never find those invaders, there isn't a political entity left that will have an independent army."

"Political entities be damned," said Gletkin. "Let's get out there and review those new oxygen bottles!"

"BY GOLLY," said Bristol one day, as he and his two companions were reviewing the graduating class of the Space Academy in Paris—giving them a sweeping inspection which left many of the youngsters pale before the threat that they might not pass even after these months of training—"By golly, we've penetrated the hub of the galaxy, Gletkin." He flipped the message in his hand just given him by a runner. "That means that we've done fifty percent of the search without result."

"Who cares how long or how far?" said Gletkin. "We'll find them!"

"They might not exist," said Bristol.

"Bah!" said Gletkin. "Young man, you look puny to me. Jump that hurdle over there fifty times. Now you, sonny—"

Day by day, week by week. And Bristol, each time he reported to the Council, saw the big star map. The lights were increasing, the flags were a multitude now. On a spindle before it were dispatches which told of rich land and richer planets than Earth, strange beasts, great forests, empires.

"Captain, please appoint an expedition coordinator," said the president of the council.

"But I thought your staff—"

"No, I mean old expeditions," said the president. "There may be data from those wildcat days we can use."

It was big and hot in the council chamber. The room was packed today. Bristol got up to leave. But the great black doors

FINAL ENEMY

opened and Commander Godolphin stood there.

He was haggard from long voyaging and he came unsteadily across the room. He saw Bristol and brightened. Godolphin turned and motioned in another officer, a Russian, equally travel-stained.

"Gentlemen," said Bristol, standing, "I believe we have news here. My second in command."

Godolphin flinched at the straining necks and peering eyes. But he came forward and put an envelope in Bristol's hand. Behind him the Asian officer stood uncertainly, saw no member of his own nation that he recognized and dropped an envelope of his own before Bristol.

The captain took them, broke their seals and scanned them.

"Gentlemen," said Bristol gravely, getting to his feet again, "I have here some news of the greatest importance." He drew a breath and poured out the envelope.

Five items fell to the table from Godolphin's package. They were a pair of glare-goggles, an ancient army pistol, a rifle, a ration can and a small dogtag.

"Make your report, commander," said Bristol.

Self-consciously, Godolphin said, "We found him at the end of a tunnel which had been closed by a landslide. He'd crawled halfway through the debris and died there, trying to get out. He was wearing an old-style cloth spacesuit and khaki and he had this stuff on him."

Bristol said, "This dog-tag reads:

TSU CHIANG-LO
TUBEMAN, FIRST CLASS, GREATER
ASIAN ARMY.

Gletkin leaned over and stared at it. He blinked. "That's right! That's what it says!" And he grabbed up the Asian package.

WILL YOU BE 1 OUT OF 9?

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

Only three items fell out: an old space boot, a brass cartridge for a Garand rifle and an empty poison gas cylinder.

The Asian messenger looked uncomfortable as Gletkin glared at him.

"We found them in the mud," said the messenger. "They'd sunk beside the place where we figured the spaceship had landed. We panned all the dirt and got these."

Bristol looked quietly at the silent hall. He could feel the sag and sudden absence of all effort or care. He spoke slowly.

"I think, gentlemen," said Bristol, "that this is a case of cross-purposes. In the first days of exploration we were terribly suspicious of one another as nations. We never published our records or findings because our governments forbade it, trying to keep new planets to themselves. Because planets never kept the same names long and were rediscovered often and because good space navigation had not yet been invented, nobody knew where he'd been for sure. And the Asians found the remains of our expedition to what they called Arachne and we found the remains of one of their men on what we called New Chicago. The records were never properly coordinated. And so we have lost. There never was an invader."

Silence lasted long then. But suddenly the council's president stood. He looked sweepingly about the chamber and he turned and looked back at the wall.

"There never was?" he said in a challenging tone. "There never was? And we've reorganized an entire planet, entire sciences, all mankind! And we've sent our ships scurrying across hundreds of thousands of light-years to strange new lands. There never was?"

The council members looked at him. A thrill of excitement began to course through the room.

"Gentlemen!" cried the president of the council of all nations. "Gentlemen, *WE* are the invaders from space!"

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

(Continued from page 98)

P.S. Don't think I don't like S³. It's better than most s-f mags. In fact, the reason I'm writing to S³ is that the others are too far gone to be helped.

... Note to predatory fan-clubs: My summer address is 457 Schenectady Ave., Brooklyn 3, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

In the latest issue of SSS to reach me, I noticed letters from England, Holland and Germany. So, to show you just how widely your magazine does circulate—here is a letter from Australia!

Frankly, I did not care for the old SSS, and when I heard it was being revived, I could not care less. Imagine my surprise then, upon receiving issues of the revived publication, to find that the new publishers, Popular Publications, had turned out a really superior prozine. Although all the stories have been good, what I like most about your magazine is its artwork. Without doubt, the illustrations appearing in SSS ARE THE BEST IN ANY SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE. Note, I say science fiction magazine. There are several fantasy and weird publications, whose illustrations I like equally as well as yours, but among the dozen or so magazines printing mainly scientific stories, I say emphatically, that yours stands head and shoulders above the rest for the quality of its artwork. Your best artists are Paul, Bok and Callé, please keep them. Paul's illustration on page 104 of the July 1949 issue was superb. Your best cover was the April 1949 issue. I repeat, keep Paul, Callé and Bok.

So many of the science-fiction magazines today are specializing in one type of story. One magazine, (perhaps I had better not mention names) goes in mainly for stories of an ultra-technical nature. Another prints space opera of the Buck Rogers variety. But in SSS, you have achieved a nice balance between these two extremes. Keep up the good work, and best wishes to the New SSS for a long life.

Sincerely,
Roger N. Dard,
232 James St.
Perth,
Western Australia

We're the same publishers as before, Roger—new editors, though. Thanks for the tip that you like us in Australia, too. Any other countries still to be heard from?

Dear Editor:

By far the best thing in your May issue was the beyootiful Finlay on page 57.

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

Virgil has a truly magic touch when it comes to drawing monsters or aliens.

The stories are difficult to rate. Most of them were mediocre, but none were really bad. George O's **DEATH CRYSTAL** I would rate at the top, with **THE VAN-ISHERS** just a quarter of a step behind. Burks had a very good start, but his ending was weak and disappointing. It almost gave the impression that he worked himself into a hole with his **Shadow Men** and couldn't figger out any good conclusion so he merely left it hanging in mid-air. Roger Dee must have been reading Bradbury before he penned **SLAVE OF ETERNITY**. Me-thinks I smelled a subtle influence therein.

The cover was actually good, but it could have been better if the girl had been left out entirely. I see you've finally admitted your covers have no resemblance to the stories, even going so far as to give it a title of its own. Beastly original, that "War of the Worlds"!

What happened to 21MM392, 41C-98, and the rest of the boys? I was just getting to the point where I enjoyed Mr. Jones' metal-men space opera and now it vanishes from S.S.S.'s cherished pages. I hope it makes itself known again in the near future.

Continue to use Mr. Callé in the art department, but please, **PLEASE** get rid of Van Dongen. I just got over the disorder caused by viewing his atrocities in Merritt's Magazine and now he turns up in S.S.S.

This is all, you lucky fellow, except for one last wish. Could you please try to get us one little old story by Leigh Brackett? Hm-mm-mm? (Could try.—Ed.)

Hopefully,
Allan Leverentz
320 Stenzel St.,
N. Tonawanda, N. Y.

"The Mind Masters", in this issue, is the twentieth Professor Jameson story to see print; and there are more coming up. Mr. Jones has been spinning this saga since 1931, when the first of the series, "The Jameson Satellite", was published. He has written twenty-three Jameson stories in all—a grand total of 363,000 words. (Book publishers, please note.) Unless we are badly mistaken, this is both the oldest and the longest science-fiction series still in publication. Mr. Jones, who rates in our book as one of the Grand Old Men of s-f, shows no signs of faltering enthusiasm for his metal creations, and we hope to bring you many more adventures of the spacefaring Zoromes.

FANDOM'S CORNER

(Continued from page 8)

but we disagree with Art Rapp that fandom could exist without the pro sf mags.

Eusifanso, No. 6, May 1950, published by the Eugene Science-Fantasy Society, P.O. Box 161, Eugene, Ore. 10¢. This magazine was a great and pleasant surprise to us. Formerly a well-mimeographed fan mag, this issue becomes a neat printed mag. 12 half-letter size pages of interesting articles, poems and news notes. Neat. Get a copy.

Fan Fare, No. 3, published bimonthly by W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Rd., North Tonawanda, N. Y. 15¢. This neat mimeographed (with hectographed cover) 20-page fan mag features mostly fiction written by fans. Most of the stories presented are very interesting and worth reading. Our only suggestions are: a better cover artist and some inside illustration. Keep up the good work.

Spaceship, Vol. 2, No. 4, April 1950. Published by Bob Silverberg and Saul Diskin, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N. Y. 5¢. The photo-offset cover and mimeo interior of this half-letter size fan mag are a great improvement, but it still has a long way to go. This issue features the story "The Tolls of Time" by C. I. Morris, which is not bad. Keep improving, boys.

Science Fiction News Letter, No. 15, (formerly *Bloomington News Letter*) published by Bob Tucker, Box 260, Bloomington, Ill. Free, tho in the near future, subscriptions will be asked. Bob does a wonderful job of news-telling in this 8-page, letter-size, photo-offset newspaper. Book news, pro mag news, fans news and those small items that fans like so much, all put together in one of the best formats of its kind we've seen. By all means get a copy.

Orb, No. 4, published bimonthly by Bob Johnson, 811 9th St., Greeley, Colo. 15¢. This legal-size magazine is amaz-

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

ing—the only one we know of that is published in photo-offset, mimeograph and hecto. All three are blended in a very interesting magazine. The cover by Ralph Raybury Phillips is excellent, but first prize goes to the three-page picture story of the movie "The Wizard of Oz". It is told with 13 picture scenes from the movie.

Operation Fantast, No. 4, March 1950, published quarterly by Capt. K. F. Slater, of England. U.S. fans contact John E. Koestner, 2124 Rene Ct., Brooklyn 27, N.Y. 15¢ This 16-page printed magazine continues to improve with every issue. Contains numerous articles of interest to all sf fans. We pick "Titus Groan" by Dr. David H. Keller as the best.

The Nekromantik, No. 2, Summer 1950, published quarterly at 1905 Spruce Ave., Kansas City 1, Mo. Edited and published by Manly Banister. 25¢. This is tops in fan publishing. One of the best fiction fan mags we've ever seen.

Sirius, No. 1, March-April 1950, published by Stan Serxner, 1308' Hoe Ave., Bronx 59, N.Y. 15¢. Excellent cover by M. Friedman via photo-offset. Fiction and articles in this mag are not bad, but the mimeoing and format are bad, very bad. With a little more improvement the mag would be okay.

Send in your fan magazines to be reviewed to Fandom's Corner, c/o *Super Science Stories*, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y. We are also interested in news of your organizations. Local, national and international fantasy clubs are requested to keep us informed of changes in their organizations. New clubs, please let us know your requirements for members.

In the future this column will publish requests from fan magazine editors for material. You editors that need material, let us know just what it is you need and we'll publish your request in this column, so that our readers can supply it for you.

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